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THE DOCTRINE OF PRAYER

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PREFACE

THIS is the first of a short series of books on the Great Christian Doctrines. There is, I believe, a widespread and earnest desire on the part of teachers of the Bible to do more than has lately been done for the teaching of Christian doctrine. The complaint that doctrine is dry is due to the way it is taught, even more than to the "spirit of the age". Anything is dry that is disorderly or unreal. In this volume the Doctrine of Prayer is presented in an orderly sequence, and contact with reality is maintained at every step by means of illustration or example.

Prayer was chosen as the subject of the first volume of the series before the War began; and it did not seem necessary even then to apologize for the choice. The difficulties of the doctrine are not few or trifling; but every doctrine has its difficulties, and we have come to some conclusions about Prayer which give us courage. Even before the War there were many signs of a new interest in it and new hope from its exercise. How these signs have multiplied is known to every one. This one thing at least that is good the War has done for us already. Let us not miss our opportunity. Prayer is not an easy exercise. It requires encouragement, exposition, and training. There never was a time when men

and women were more sincerely anxious to be told how to pray. Prayer is the mightiest weapon in our armoury, and if we are to use it as God has given us the encouragement, we must do everything in our power to bring it into exercise.

A list of books which have been read, and from some of which quotations have been made, is given before each chapter.

JAMES HASTINGS.

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I.

INTRODUCTION.

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INTRODUCTION.

"IN one shape or another," says Bishop Phillips Brooks,[1] "the religious question which gives thoughtful religious people the most trouble is probably the question of prayer. We cannot doubt that it has always been so. We feel sure that in every condition of religion, down to the lowest, in which men are moved to supplicate God at all, the struggle between the two feelings, between the instinct that God must hear and answer and the doubt whether God can hear and answer, has been always going on. It is not a struggle of our days alone; it is not a question which certain peculiar tendencies of our time have brought out. It is as old as David; nay, as old as Job, as old as all religion."

Here we have at once the two great primary facts about prayer. There is an instinct in men to seek fellowship with God in prayer, and yet it demands an effort of the will to pray. Round these two facts all the difficulties of prayer as well as all its advantages may be said to gather. Let us glance at them separately before we begin the proper subject of this Introduction, which is the Proof and the Practice of Prayer.

1. The instinct of prayer is to us like the wing of a bird to a bird and the fin of a fish to a fish. The wing of the bird demands the air, the fin of the fish demands the water, the instinct of prayer demands God. Therefore the only monstrosity of nature, just as much a monstrosity as a wingless bird or a finless fish, is the prayerless man or woman, because the deepest and most real instinct they have is not satisfied.

¶ Strong as may be my admiration for the beautiful, deeply as I may be stirred by the strains of melody, there is yet another emotion more powerful and more lasting than either of these, and

[1] *The Mystery of Iniquity*, 296.

that is my desire for communion with God in the form of prayer. The love of the beautiful may lessen with the decrease of my powers, the desire for music may wane as I grow decrepit, but the wish to pray grows stronger as the years are added to my life.[1]

(1) This instinct is far older than Christianity itself, for it is the expression of a dependence upon God which in every age has been prominent in the consciousness and conduct of men. Jesus Christ did not create it. He found it already highly developed; and, by His revelation of the Fatherhood of God, He directed and guided it towards Him. This, indeed, was the entire aim of His redeeming life and death—so to capture and control this common instinct of dependence in men that they should become worshipping children and so partake of all the soul-renewing results of that worship.

¶ Dr. Knox, Bishop of Manchester, preaching on the sands at Blackpool, told a story of a miner who called himself an infidel. One day in the mine some coal began to fall, and the man cried out, "Lord, save me". Then a fellow-miner turned to him and said, "Ay, there's nowt like cobs o' coal to knock th' infidelity out o' a man". Yes, men may try to keep down the instinct of prayer, but there are times in every life when it will be heard.[2]

(2) Therefore let us recognize the fact that we are never so natural as when we pray. Over and over again we find that people in the workshops and in the great houses of business in cities will almost flout the man or woman who goes regularly to church or who says his or her prayers. They point out, as they imagine, that it is an unnatural thing to do—an unnatural thing on a beautiful Sunday afternoon to spend an hour in a house of prayer. What we must recognize, in the first place, is this: that we are most natural when we pray, for if there is one thing certain about human nature, it is that man is a praying animal, and is born to pray.

¶ In our present order, there is no voice so sweet, so powerful, so essentially human, as that of prayer, none other so natural to a being like man, at once rational, fallen, and *redeemed*. It is possible, without any great strain upon imagination, to conceive

[1] J. McCann, *The Autobiography of a Soul*, 109.
[2] G. C. Leader, *Wanted—a Boy*, 74.

of inanimate creation as filled with praise. It is easy to think of the winds and waves in their restless movement, the birds in their song, the stars in their silence, the very grass and flowers, as worshipping God in their beauty and their gladness. Often the air around us seems full of thanksgiving, breathless with adoration; but who, even in poetry, ever dreamt that nature *prayed!* Prayer is the voice of one who errs and loves; of one who sins, and suffers, and aspires; it is the voice of a child to its father, the voice of man to his God.[1]

2. But the instinct to pray no more indicates the prayerful life than the musical ear denotes the accomplished musician. Both are but the foundations on which unremitting endeavour erects mastery. As the pianist day after day sounds forth upon his instrument the changes of his scales and finger exercises, so the master Christian breathes his daily petitions and thanksgivings, not as constituting in themselves the prayer which God enjoins, but as the ceaseless exercise which enables the soul to sound celestial harmonies.

¶ Why should we pray? And, as we ask ourselves the question, I suppose that the first answer must be, "Because of a deep inherited instinct which has been trained and fostered from our childhood by those we love". Notice, we must have the whole answer. Whether a child would pray if it was never taught may fairly be questioned; but certainly there would always be in it that deep instinct for prayer—a deep instinct which still remains, too, in the minds and hearts of men who have ceased to believe in a God; for a man once told me most pathetically that, though all his faith had gone, every morning regularly he practised what he called self-reflection to satisfy that instinct of prayer which he could satisfy in no other way.[2]

I.

The Proof of Prayer.

1. Notwithstanding the importance of prayer in religion and life, it finds little place in theology. The largest treatises are at one with the smallest manuals of systematic theology in giving but a very subordinate place to the discussion of its problems, if

[1] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 140.

[2] A. F. Winnington Ingram, *The Gospel in Action*, 245.

they give any place at all. Why is this? "It seems to me," says Professor Everett, "not to enter naturally and fittingly into theological discussion. For prayer should be simply the natural expression of the spiritual life at that stage, whatever it may be, at which the soul finds itself. Whatever the religious standpoint of a man may be, he should be left to himself to express his spiritual life naturally. If his religion does not impel him to pray, then prayer will be for him artificial unless indeed it be the prayer for prayer."

There is then, properly speaking, no possibility of one person proving to another that prayer is of any value. In a remarkable sermon preached to the Wakefield Church Congress in 1886, on the "Reasonableness and Efficacy of Prayer," Bishop Reichel boldly asserted that "we can have no knowledge of the hearing and answering of prayer, such as shall be capable of being proved to others. All attempts to demonstrate the efficacy of prayer must fail." "But," he added, "certainly one thing may be said with perfect truth, and that is, that no one who has been in the habit of praying in the way in which a creature ought to pray to his Creator, with the due measure of commingled reverence and awe, will say that his doing so has been useless and ineffective."

There is a certain amount of evidence which may be produced, but the external evidence for the success of particular prayers may not be decisive. It is capable of being explained until it is virtually explained away. With our very limited and uncertain understanding of historical antecedents, it is generally open to us to make several conjectures as to the causes which have led to an event; and consequently it must always be difficult, if not impossible, to secure agreement as to the nature of the forces which have been at work in any specified case. Tests that at one time might have been deemed satisfactory, at another would be distrusted and disallowed. Thus, for example, it may safely be predicted that the hospital-ward test will never again be proposed, as it was in 1872. In view of our extending knowledge of what can be effected by telepathy, it could no longer be regarded as conclusive. It would not now be doubted that a number of persons who directed their thoughts and wishes in prayer towards a group of sufferers might be the means of producing a remarkable change in their condition. What might be questioned would

be the inference that anything more than human intervention was necessary in any instance to explain the result.

¶ Our present day seems full of question, of urgency on all points connected with prayer. It seems disposed to put it to the proof, to ask what it can effect or alter; it appears inclined, as regards this great subject, to ask for a sign from heaven; but what sign can be given it but the sign of the Son of Man in heaven? The warfare of prayer and its accomplishment is the warfare, the accomplishment, of the Cross, a conquest through apparent defeat. Its work is one with that great effectual Work in which its strength lies wrapped and hidden. It is, like it, a real work and an effectual work, though one of which the believer, with his Lord, must sometimes be content to say—"I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength in vain, yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God".[1]

2. But we are not dependent on external evidence. Who that has prayed diligently, and experienced an answer, does not know that that one experience has done more for the life of religion in his or her soul than a great deal of reading or thinking? That consciousness of our relation to God is a thing which will develop through all eternity; but it has its beginning here, and the reason why God makes things depend upon our asking for them is that we may be thus educated into such personal intercourse with Him that that truth of sonship may never be merged and lost as it is merged and lost in all that direction of life which, unconsecrated by prayer, moves away from God.

Prayer is reasonable because it works. How many men have had some terrible temptation, and have lifted up their minds to God and prayed for helping grace in times of necessity, and have felt in their deepest self the answer given in the strength by which they have been sustained. Or our light has been low, a flickering taper, a smoking flax; we have looked at little things as though they were big, and at big things as though they were little, and there has been no desire to pray or move in the higher and outer space at all. Then we have suddenly prayed, and, like John Wesley, have felt our hearts "strangely warmed". The blessed power of old truths has been resuscitated, and we have waited on the Lord and renewed our strength.

[1] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 147.

¶ The sense of God's presence brings with it the desire, the right, the power, to approach the throne of grace at any time, for anything, about anyone. The more God's nearness is enjoyed, the oftener can He be gone to. No holy place need prepare one, no service-book need prompt one. No priest need lead one, no saint or angel intercede for one. The "assurance of God's love" is the great atmosphere, the charter, and the exemplar of believing prayer. One answered prayer is a greater proof of God's presence than many apologies. God's presence realized makes one as sensitive and tender to others' needs as to his own. No one can be near God and not desire forgiveness for his brother as well as himself. And God's felt presence—which is assurance—brings not only the desire for this, but strong confidence in asking it.[1]

Prayer the Churche's banquet, Angel's age,
God's breath in man returning to his birth,
The soul in paraphrase, heart in pilgrimage,
The Christian plummet sounding heav'n and earth;

Engine against th' Almightie, sinner's towre,
Reversèd thunder, Christ-side-piercing spear,
The six-daies-world transposing in an houre,
A kind of tune which all things heare and fear;

Softnesse, and peace, and joy, and love, and blisse,
Exalted manna, gladnesse of the best,
Heaven in ordinarie, man well drest,
The milkie way, the bird of Paradise,

Church-bels beyond the starres heard, the soul's bloud,
The land of spices, something understood.[2]

II.

The Practice of Prayer.

The proof of prayer is the practice of it. The practice is everything. However little we may be able to prove to others the efficacy of prayer, we know that all is well if we pray.

1. But here is the difficulty. We know but we do not. We know that nothing too glorious can be claimed for prayer and yet we are slow to pray. That contrast between the ideal and the actual, which often impresses us so painfully, is, perhaps,

[1] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 29. [2] George Herbert.

never more apparent than when we come to make a comparison between the theory and the practice of prayer. In theory, prayer is a thing sacred and glorious beyond the power of words to describe. No privilege possible to men is worthy to be put by the side of the privilege of communion with God. No joy can thrill the heart like the joy of the man who knows that he is in the presence of the Creator and Ruler of all, and is conscious that his appeal is heard. No peace can be so profound or so holy as the peace which possesses the minds of those who have entered into the meaning of this mystery, and, by an act of faith or in a moment of vision, have claimed for themselves the unspeakable blessing which it brings. It is surely impossible to say too much of the glory and honour with which that man is crowned, of the grace, the power, the tranquillity, and the gladness, which have become his portion who has learned how to pray. That must be acknowledged by all who have ever had any religious instinct or aspiration.

And yet, when we consider the practice of men, and begin to inquire into their actual experience, we are apt to find that prayer does not by any means appear to be in reality what it is in theory. We find that it is approached as a duty rather than valued as a privilege, and often as a duty not of the most attractive kind. Men ought to pray; and they pray, or try to pray, sometimes with poor success, because they ought. But the time and the strength which are given to the work are given, if the truth must be confessed, but grudgingly. The complaint has become common in our churches that the meeting for prayer is scantily attended, and that, on the whole, small interest is taken in it. The charm of music may give to the service an attractiveness in the eyes of some, and sermons and addresses may serve to commend it, or to make it endurable to others. But the mere praying would seem to have little fascination for many minds. There is little beauty in it that men should desire it, little sacredness in it that it should be held in honour. It is counted almost a strange thing that a gentleman, and a man of education and resources, should frequent prayer-meetings. "How odd," it is said, "that a man like that should go to such places, when there must be so many things to interest and occupy his thoughts, and claim his attention." That a feeling like this, of distaste and

almost of quiet scorn for the prayer-meeting, prevails in many quarters will scarcely be disputed.

And though we must speak with greater reserve of private prayer, seeing that we know little of the habits of men in this respect, yet there are not wanting signs and testimonies that the prayers which are made in the closet to the Father, which seeth in secret, are very far indeed from being what they might be expected to be, or from bringing to those who offer them what they might be expected to bring.

2. The only remedy is to pray, and by praying to encourage others to pray. If we pray sincerely once, we will pray again. If we pray as we can to-day, to-morrow we shall pray better. If we wait to pray till prayer shall be less difficult, we shall never pray. The voice of God is calling to us, "Seek ye my face". That voice calls to us in many ways, in Scripture, in conscience, in providence, in every event, common or special, glad or grave, welcome or sorrowful. Let us see that, when God says, "Seek ye my face," we are ready, every one to answer with the Psalmist, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek". There is a piece of shrewd philosophy in the Book of Proverbs (iv. 7, R.V. margin), which applies to our learning to pray successfully, as well as to many other works and devices under the sun. It reads: "The beginning of wisdom is, Get wisdom". That is to say, in colloquial English: The way to learn to do a thing is to "go at it". We can learn to swim only by getting into the water and striking out. We can learn to play the piano or violin only by playing it. Practice is the chief item in all the arts, and in none more than in the art of prayer.

¶ By praying, prayer is proved. No argument establishes it apart from practice, while the practice renders argument unnecessary.[1]

¶ Thou wilt say that I speak too high on this matter of prayer which is indeed no *mastery* nor difficulty for me to write, but it were a great *mastery* for a man to practise it.[2]

¶ If I try to set forth something of the reasonableness of all prayer, I beg my readers to remember that it is for the sake of action and not speculation; if prayer be anything at all, it is a thing to be done: what matter whether you agree with me or not,

[1] R. F. Horton, *The Prayer-House of God*, 7. [2] Walter Hilton.

if you do not pray? I would not spend my labour for that; I desire it to serve for help to pray, not to understand how a man might pray and yet be a reasonable soul.[1]

¶ Fletcher of Madeley, a great teacher of a century and a half ago, used to lecture to the young theological students. He was one of the fellow-workers with Wesley, and a man of most saintly character. When he had lectured on one of the great topics of the Word of God, such as the Fulness of God's Holy Spirit or on the power and blessing that He meant His people to have, he would close the lecture, and say, "That is the theory; now will those who want the practice come along up to my room?" And again and again they closed their books and went away to his room, where the hour's theory would be followed by one or two hours of prayer.[2]

3. Of what does an act of prayer consist? It consists always of three separate forms of activity which, in the case of different persons, co-exist in very varying degrees of intensity, but which are found, in some degree, in all who pray, whenever they pray.

(1) To pray is, first of all, to put the *affections* in motion; it is to open the heart. The object of prayer is the Uncreated Love, the Eternal Beauty—He of whose beauty all that moves love and admiration here is at best a pale reflection. To be in His presence in prayer is to be conscious of an expansion of the heart, and of the pleasure that accompanies it, which we feel, in another sense, when speaking with an intimate and loved friend or relative. And this movement of the affections is sustained throughout the act of prayer. It is invigorated by the spiritual sight of God, but it is also the original impulse which leads us to draw near to Him. In true prayer, as in teaching, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh".

Prayer is the utterance before God of emotion. The deep and secret emotions of the heart are in worship uttered or poured out before God. Thus in worship we act on the invitation, "Pour out your hearts before him". Now this applies to all the varieties of true worship. It applies even to *supplication*. A large proportion of our worship, sometimes too large a proportion, consists of requests. Request is the lowest form of worship, for it turns

[1] George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, ii. 58.
[2] Hubert Brooke, *One Faith and One Family*, 30.

the thoughts towards self. We ask that we may receive, and that which we hope to receive is the great object of our prayer. But even these requests are all of them the expressions of emotion; for is it not an earnest desire that prompts them, and what is that desire but a strong emotion? When, *e.g.*, we pray, "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit," does not the prayer arise from the strong, earnest desire after a spotless holiness, and is not that desire one of the most sacred emotions that the Holy Spirit ever draws forth from the heart of the regenerate man? But if it applies to supplication or request, how much more does it apply to adoration!

But prayer also kindles emotion. If love prompts worship, it must surely follow that worship will kindle love. We see this in a comparison of Psalm xviii. and Psalm cxvi. In both is declared love for Jehovah, and in both is it connected with His worship. But there is this difference: in xviii. the love leads to the worship, and in cxvi. the worship calls forth the love. In xviii. the Psalmist says, "I will love thee, O Lord" (ver. 1), and then adds, as a consequence of that love (ver. 3), "I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised"; whereas, in cxvi. 1, he says, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications". He loved as he went in, but he loved still more as he came out.

(2) To pray is, next, to put the *understanding* in motion, and to direct it upon the highest object to which it can possibly address itself, the Infinite God. In our private prayers, as in our public liturgies, we generally preface the petition itself by naming one or more of His attributes. Almighty and Everlasting God! If the understanding is really at work at all, how overwhelming are the ideas, the truths, which pass thus before it: a boundless Power, an Existence which knows neither beginning nor end. Then the substance of the petition, the motives which are alleged for urging it, the issues which depend upon its being granted or being refused, present themselves to the eye of the understanding. And when prayer is not addressed to our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the fact that it is addressed to the Father through Him, and in reliance on His merits and mediation, opens upon Christian thought the inmost mysteries before the Eternal Throne. And thus any common act of real prayer keeps, not the imagination,

but the understanding, occupied earnestly, absorbingly, under the guidance of faith, from first to last.

The first ingredient in prayer is, not intelligence, but movement of the spirit—of the soul. The raw material of prayer, so to put it, is a vague aspiration of the soul towards its true Object.

"Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks,
So longeth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul is athirst for God;
Yea even for the living God.
When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?"

The motive of this movement is a sense of need, a sense of weakness, a sense of dependence. It is perfectly compatible with very shadowy perceptions of God; it is the cry of a child towards its parent, whom it sees only indistinctly in the distance or in the twilight; it is an impulse, an enthusiasm, an emotion; it is a breathing, an aspiration. The raw material of prayer is not its intellectual element; it is its element of impulse, of love, of moral movement, vigorous and resolute in its endeavour, yet vague and indeterminate as to its course and its Object. Undoubtedly, very earnest prayer is often compatible with a slight exercise of the understanding. "I will pray with the spirit" is a resolution which can be carried into practice, if it stands alone, more easily than "I will pray with the understanding," if it stands alone. The understanding alone does not pray—it only thinks; and thought is a very different thing from prayer. Thought about God or about ourselves is not of itself that inward movement towards God which is at bottom an impulse from on high, and which is the first and the essential step in real prayer. The uninstructed, the young, the very ill, the almost despairing, the broken-hearted, can say, after the Apostle, when they can say little else, "I will pray with the spirit".

But although the understanding cannot give the first impulse to prayer, it can supply guidance to it. It is very needful, if the original impulse, which is the essence of prayer, is to be brought into shape and made permanently serviceable to the soul. The original energy of prayer is supplied by emotion; its regulation is secured by the understanding, that is, the understanding illuminated by Divine grace. Without this understanding, the

spirit of prayer is like fluid metal which runs into irregular forms from want of a mould. Without the understanding, the spirit of prayer is like great natural ability which is wasted or misused from want of good training. Without the understanding, devotional impulse will easily pass into boisterous and even irreverent rhapsody, or shrink back to the lifeless monotony of mere form. The understanding takes the devotional impulse or spirit in hand, rouses it to jealous and vigorous consciousness, bids it consider who He is who is the real Object of prayer, what is sought of Him, why He is applied to for this particular benefit, what are the fitting steps in the application.

The understanding thus secures a double result. It introduces point, purpose, order, into what, without it, would be aimless and unregulated impulse; and it does more—it secures reverence. Without injuring the tenderness of the relations which bind a living soul to its God and its Redeemer, it is there as a perpetual reminder of His Unapproachable Majesty, and of the nothingness of all creatures before Him.

¶ A man's religious life must keep pace with the growth of his knowledge and powers of reflection, or he will learn to think of it as a thing divided from all practical interests, as a mere reminiscence of his childhood; he will gradually drop if he does not deliberately reject it. A man's prayers must prompt and accompany his most deliberate actions; they must, if it may be, keep abreast of the entire range of his mental and moral effort. New subjects will constantly crowd for recognition; new forms of occupation, new friendships, new materials for thought and speculation, new difficulties, anxieties, trials; new hopes and fears; the varying fortunes of our families; the course of public events; the conduct of our rulers; the failures or triumphs of the Church; the constant departure—one after another—of those whom we have known and loved, to another world, and the sense, which each day that passes must deepen, that our own turn must come ere long—all this is material for prayer, which is constantly accumulating.[1]

¶ A prayer must have thought in it. The thought may overburden it so that its wings of devotion are fastened down to its sides and it cannot ascend. Then it is no prayer, only a meditation or a contemplation. But to take the thought out of a prayer

[1] H. P. Liddon, *Sermons on Some Words of St. Paul*, 186.

does not insure its going up to God. It may be too light as well as too heavy to ascend. I saw once in a shop-window in London a placard which simply announced "Limp Prayers". It described, I believe, a kind of Prayer Book in a certain sort of binding which was for sale within; but it brought to mind many a prayer to which one had listened, in which he could not join, out of which had been left the whole backbone of thought, and to which he could attach none of his own heart's desires.[1]

(3) Once more, to pray is to put the *will* in motion, just as decidedly as we do when we sit down to read hard, or when we walk up a steep hill against time. That sovereign power in the soul which we name the will does not merely, in prayer, impel us to make the first necessary mental effort, but it also enters most penetratingly and vitally into the very action of the prayer itself. It is the will which presses the petition; it is the will which struggles with the reluctance of sloth or with the secret opposition of sinful passion; it is the will which perseveres; it is the will which exclaims: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me". The amount of will which we severally carry into the act of prayer is the ratio of its sincerity; and where prayer is at once real and prolonged, the demands which it makes upon our power of concentrating determination into a specific and continuous act are very considerable indeed.

¶ There has been much debate among the learned concerning the psychology of religion; and scholars have compared the reason, the emotions, and the will as elements in religious experience. Do we in religion, first of all, think, or feel, or act? Some teachers have urged that the essence of religion must be found in thought. Right thinking is the foundation of a saving faith. The truth makes one free. Who is the Christian? It is he who has been taught the truth about God, Christ, the Church, and the Christian creed. Other teachers have regarded the emotions as the fundamental element in religious experience. Behind all doctrines of theology, they say, lies the religious sentiment itself, and this feeling of dependence supplants all necessity of proof. Who is the Christian? It is he who has been thus deeply stirred by the emotion of religion. "The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." Now, no doubt, there is much to say in behalf of both rationalism and mysticism. A definite theology and a profound emotion are

[1] Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching*, 248.

essential parts of a complete religious life. Yet when we turn to the teaching of Jesus, we observe an extraordinary emphasis on the third element of consciousness, the will. "My meat," He says, "is to do the will of him that sent me." "Whosoever shall do the will of God . . . the same is my brother, and my sister;" and still more strongly in this verse from the Fourth Gospel: "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching". However important it may be to have a creed that is sound or an emotion that is warm, the Christian life, according to the Gospels, is primarily determined by the direction of the will, the fixing of the desire, the habit of obedience, the faculty of decision. When a modern psychologist says that "The willing-department of life dominates both the thinking-department and the feeling-department," he is in fact but repeating the great words: "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the teaching". Here is the aspect of the religious life which gives courage and hope to many a consciously imperfect experience. You are not sure about your creed? That is a pity. You do not respond to the emotion of the revivalist or the poet? That also is a loss. But, after all, the fundamental question concerns the discipline of your will. Are you determined in your purpose? Have you the will to do the will? Then, even with half a creed and less than half a pious ecstasy, you are at least in the line of the purpose of Jesus Christ and, as you will to do the will, may come some day to know the teaching. "Obedience," said Frederick Robertson, "is the organ of spiritual knowledge." First the discipline of the will, then the truth which lies beyond that ethical decision. Our thoughts may grow breathless as they climb; our emotions may ebb as they flow; but our wills may march steadily up the heights of life, or flow steadily through the experiences of life as a river seeks the sea. The profoundest modern statement of Christian faith is the confession of Tennyson:—

> Our wills are ours, we know not how,
> Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.[1]

¶ The three ingredients of prayer—emotion, intellect, will—are also ingredients in all real work, whether of the brains or of the hands. The sustained effort of the intelligence and of the will must be seconded in work no less than in prayer by a movement of the affections, if work is to be really successful. A man must love his work to do it well. The difference between prayer and ordinary work is that in prayer the three ingredients are more equally balanced. Study may in time become intellectual habit,

[1] F. G. Peabody, *Mornings in the College Chapel*, ii. 200.

which scarcely demands any effort of will: handiwork may in time become so mechanical as to require little or no guidance from thought: each may exist in a considerable, although not in the highest, degree of excellence, without any co-operation of the affections. Not so prayer. It is always the joint act of the will and the understanding, impelled by the affections; and when either will or intelligence is wanting, prayer at once ceases to be itself, by degenerating into a barren intellectual exercise, or into a mechanical and unspiritual routine.[1]

[1] H. P. Liddon.

II.

The Nature of Prayer.

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THE NATURE OF PRAYER.

PRAYER may be understood widely, so as to include every form of address from man to God, whatever its character. Hannah's song is a thanksgiving, yet it is introduced by the words "Hannah prayed and said". The prayer of Habakkuk is a psalm.

In the larger sense of the word, as the spiritual language of the soul, prayer is intercourse with God, often seeking no end beyond the pleasure of such intercourse. It is praise; it is congratulation; it is adoration of the Infinite Majesty; it is a colloquy in which the soul engages with the All-wise and the All-holy; it is a basking in the sunshine, varied by ejaculations of thankfulness to the Sun of Righteousness for His light and His warmth. In this larger sense, the earlier part of the Te Deum is prayer as much as the latter part; the earliest and latest clauses of the Gloria in Excelsis as truly as the central ones; the Sanctus or the Jubilate no less than the Litany; the Magnificat as certainly as the Fifty-first Psalm.

1. The lowest and crudest notion concerning prayer is that it consists in asking God for things, and its value consists in getting the things for which we ask. This is the notion with which childhood always begins, and the only one which childhood can entertain. This notion is also prominent in popular religious thought, and underlies much of what is said concerning answers to prayer. This view is very superficial, and is the parent of much scepticism respecting prayer. It is no uncommon thing to find young persons sceptical with respect to prayer because they have failed to get the things for which they have prayed; and often the faith of older persons breaks down from the same cause. In the stress of some trial they have faithfully prayed, and no answer has come. Friends or relatives have died, or their own health has failed, or their way has been hedged up

and all the while Heaven has seemed as deaf to their cries and entreaties as the ear of the dead; and they have been left to sorrow and uncertainty and bereavement and manifold distress. Such cases abound; and, if we would escape the painful doubts arising thence, we must revise and deepen our conception of prayer and its relation to the religious life. Plainly, the view of prayer simply as a talisman or as a means of getting things is inadequate to experience.

¶ Prayer is not, as it has been scornfully described, "only a machine warranted by theologians to make God do what His clients want": it is a great deal more than petition, which is only one department of it; it is nothing less than the whole spiritual action of the soul turned towards God as its true and adequate object. And if used in this comprehensive sense, it is clear that, as to much prayer, in the sense of spiritual intercourse with God, the question whether it is answered can never arise, for the simple reason that no answer is asked for.[1]

¶ Prayer may take on any form of personal intercourse. Unquestionably this has been the teaching of the Church. "To speak boldly," says Clement of Alexandria, "prayer is conversation and intercourse with God." "Prayer," says St. Thomas, "is the ascent of the soul to God." Sabatier repeats almost the words of Clement when he describes prayer as "intercourse with God, . . . intimate commerce, . . . interior dialogue". And the outcome of that most penetrating study of personal religion, William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, is a similar definition of prayer as "every kind of inward communion or conversation with the power recognized as divine".[2]

¶ Our Christian faith is that God's deepest purpose in the creation of men is that He may have spiritual children made in His image and likeness, who shall know Him and love Him, and to whom He may communicate Himself in blessing for ever and ever. And our earthly life is arranged by Divine wisdom for our discipline and development as the children of God. We must be practised in industry, in self-control, in integrity and faithfulness, in helpfulness and mutual trust, in the love and practice of righteousness, and in faith in God. In such a life we need pre-eminently to recognize our dependence on God, to relate our life to His will, to seek to enter into fellowship with Him.

[1] H. P. Liddon, *Some Elements of Religion*, 183.

[2] Mary Whiton Calkins, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, iv. 491.

This religious desire and effort of the soul to relate itself and all its interests to God and His will is prayer in the deepest sense. This is essential prayer. Uttered or unexpressed, it is equally prayer. It is the soul's desire after God going forth in manifestation. It may find expression in petition, or in worship, or in obedience, or in multitudinous forms of activity; but the thing itself is always the same—the soul's striving after God. This is the prayer which may exist without ceasing, consisting, as it does, not in doing or saying this or that, but in the temper or attitude of the spirit.[1]

2. But what of the prayer of petition? The answer to this question must be that there is a psychological necessity for prayer in this form. The circumstances of human life are such that we are perpetually reminded of our needs and dependence at every turn. Goods are lacking; dangers threaten; perplexities surround us. The future is hidden, and omens of ill are rarely absent. This is true for the purely earthly life, and truer still for the hidden life of the spirit. Hence, wherever there is an active belief in God at all, there will always be petition. It is the great form in which the sense of dependence finds expression in both private and public devotion. We recall our needs, or they force themselves upon us, and we ask God for help and guidance and deliverance. Some religious thinkers of a quietistic type have condemned specific petition altogether, beyond the prayer that the will of God may be done; but this has been ecclesiastically condemned as an unreal exaltation, and is psychologically fictitious and practically impossible in most lives.

I.

Prayer is Desire.

1. Why do we pray? Because it is a vital necessity to the life of man. Prayer is desire; desire enters into everything in life, so that life is an unceasing prayer. Desire relates us to whatever we desire whether it be material things, mental attainments, or spiritual understanding. Desire may be superficial and transitory; and from such desire little return will come. A life that is filled with such desires is never able to express anything that is great or wonderful, but is satisfied with trivial results,

[1] B. P. Bowne, *The Essence of Religion*, 131.

showing that one cannot express anything that is greater or higher than the ideals that exist in the mind. When you see great things accomplished by any one, know that it is in answer to prayer; that only the great desire can bring the great result. This applies not only to some things, but to everything in life. Our lives, whatever they may be, are the true expression of our prayers. We should know that our false as well as our true desires are alike expressed, each desire as a seed carrying within itself its own fruition, each bringing its own punishment or reward. If we could all realize the truth of this, what a difference it would make in our prayers. If we knew that a true desire always related us to the good and the true, ever becoming the seed for greater and more perfect expression, or if we realized that our false desires not only brought about the loss of mental and physical energy, but also brought into our lives unpleasant and disagreeable things, we would try to shape our desires in order to have them conform to the true requirements of the law of desire and its fulfilment.

It is said, "They that desire nothing pray for nothing," and it is certainly a poor sort of prayer which has in it no earnest wish for its own success. A beggar who showed by his manner that he did not care to have his petition granted would be little likely to gain it. This desire for that which we pray for is not to be won in a moment, or excited in the soul at will. It is a part of a much wider thing—a part of the very life of God in the soul. When the heart is given to God, and the affections are set on things above, then this desire will come simply and naturally, and our prayers will be not only carefully uttered requests but holy longings and heartfelt desires.

¶ So homely a thing as the desire of animals for food and the effort to satisfy it is a form of prayer. The cry of the child for attention from its mother is a prayer. Our hunger and thirst, our dependence on food and drink for life itself, keep us, while we are on this lower plane, in a constant state of prayer. In the world of inorganic nature, as well as in the world of animal nature and of human nature on its physical side, God has made ample provision for answers to prayer. With the want come the means of satisfaction. We know that the universe is the result of absolutely orderly law and arrangement. To have provided only for the lower needs of man, disregarding his mental and spiritual

needs, would have been, to say the least, illogical. But God is not illogical. The appeals coming from a higher plane are heard and answered. "Prayer, based on want," Dr. Matheson says, "is the premonitory symptom of a larger life." The greater the want, the higher the development. In this sense the glorious advance of history is an answer to prayer. The formulating of the laws of evolution, the development of electricity, the discovery of radium and of other modern wonders which mark the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the great progress in intellectual and material affairs—all this is an answer to prayer, to the prayer of man marching to a higher development, asking consciously or unconsciously the knowledge to carry him farther.[1]

2. Prayer is the expression of a good desire. The human heart is full of restless desires, and the prayers of men consist for the most part of the unsifted petitions which are urged by their varying passions. But nothing can be plainer than this, that prayers can never be answered unless the desires that prompt them are right. And doubtless the main reason why prayers remain unanswered is that the desires have not been corrected by meditation. When Wordsworth says—

> Me this unchartered freedom tires;
> I feel the weight of chance-desires:

and appeals to duty to regulate and restrain desire, he reminds us of what we all know—that vain and contradictory desires constitute the burden of life; and that to desire what is right, and to desire it consistently and passionately, is the first condition of true living. The desires can be corrected only by truth. The mind must apprehend God, and then it will say, "There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee"; it must grasp the thought of the will of God, and then it will passionately desire that its will may be in absolute harmony with His.

Prayer means the discipline of desire. Embalmed in the 106th Psalm is the record of one of those weirdly tragic stories of the wilderness journey of the Israelites—the story of Kibroth Hattaavah or Graves of Desire. The comment is familiar:—

> He gave them their request;
> But sent leanness into their soul.

How far spiritual loss is meant to be set side by side with

[1] S. Fallows, *Health and Happiness*, 4.

material gain does not affect the fact that life through and through is tried by that contrast, and the comment on the old-world story expresses that fact with striking accuracy. The cases of Lot, Esau, Balaam, Ahab, Gehazi, Judas, and Demas illustrate the same strange possibility of inward treachery of desire. It is the fate of all who have been

Cursed with the burden of a granted prayer.

(1) That God sometimes suffers men to destroy themselves, giving them their own way, although He knows it is ruinous, and even putting into their hands the scorpion they have mistaken for a fish, is an indubitable and alarming fact. Perhaps no form of ruin covers a man with such shame or sinks him to such hopelessness as when he finds that what he has persistently clamoured for and refused to be content without has proved the bitterest and most disastrous element in his life.

¶ It is a thing partly worth our wonder, partly our compassion, that what the greatest part of men most passionately desire, that they are generally most unfit for; so that at a distance they court that as an enjoyment, which upon experience they find a plague and a great calamity.[1]

(2) How does God deal with it? For a long time He may in compassion withhold the fatal gift. He may in pity disregard our petulant clamour. And He may in many ways bring home to our minds that the thing we crave is in several respects unsuitable. We may become conscious under His discipline that without it we are less entangled with the world and with temptation; that we can live more holily and more freely as we are, and that to quench the desire we have would be to choose the better part. God may make it plain to us that it is childish to look upon this one thing as the supreme and only good. Providential obstacles are thrown in our way, difficulties amounting almost to impossibilities absolutely prevent us for a while from attaining our object, and give us time to collect ourselves and take thought. And not only are we prevented from attaining this one object, but in other respects our life is enriched and gladdened, so that we might be expected to be content.

(3) But man's will is never forced; and therefore if we con-

[1] Robert South.

tinue to pin our happiness to this one object, and refuse to find satisfaction and fruit in life without it, God "gives in anger" what we have resolved to obtain. He gives it in its bare earthly form, so that as soon as we receive it our soul sinks in our shame. Instead of expanding our nature and bringing us into a finished and satisfactory condition, and setting our life in right relations with other men, we find the new gift to be a curse to us, hampering us, cutting us off in unexpected ways from our usefulness, thwarting and blighting our life round its whole circumference.

¶ When Samuel remonstrated with Israel and warned them that their king would tyrannize over them, all the answer he got was: "Nay; but we will have a king to rule over us". But, not many days after, they came to Samuel with a very different petition: "Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king". So it is always; we speedily recognize the difference between God's wisdom and our own. What seemed neglect on His part is now seen to be care, and what we murmured at as niggardliness and needless harshness we now admire as tenderness. Those at least are our second and wiser thoughts, even although at first we may be tempted with Manoah, when he saw his son blind and fettered in the Philistine dungeon, to exclaim:—

> What thing good
> Pray'd for, but often proves our woe, our bane?
> I pray'd for children, and thought barrenness
> In wedlock a reproach; I gain'd a son
> And such a son as all men hail'd me happy;
> Who would be now a father in my stead?
> Oh, wherefore did God grant me my request,
> And as a blessing with such pomp adorn'd?
> Why are His gifts desirable, to tempt
> Our earnest prayers, then giv'n with solemn hand
> As graces, draw a scorpion's tail behind?

Such, I say, may be our first thoughts; but when the first bitterness and bewilderment of disappointment are over, when reason and right feeling begin to dominate, we own that the whole history of our prayer and its answer has been most humiliating to us, indeed, but most honouring to God. We see as never before how accurately our character has been understood, how patiently our evil propensities have been resisted, how truly our life has been guided towards the highest ends.[1]

[1] Marcus Dods, *How to Become Like Christ*, 76.

¶ You remember the story of the Argive mother, who, carried to Juno's feet by her two sons when the horses failed, prayed to the Queen of Heaven that for their filial piety her darlings might receive the richest guerdon that Heaven could bestow; and how, in answer to her prayer, when the night fell on her sleeping sons, death fell on them too, lifting them far from evil fate and making them glad with great gladness, and the hapless mother saw that the goddess had been too bountiful. It is a fable, pregnant with a lesson for us; we cannot tell how often our petitions, if granted, might, like swords of wrath, sweep away sweeter mercies from our path, leaving us shorn, defenceless, and alone.[1]

3. We must go further. Prayer is the expression of a good desire; it is also the expression of a Godward desire. As Isaac Pennington says: "By Prayer, I do not mean any bodily exercise of the outward man; but the going forth of the Spirit of life towards the Fountain of life, for fulness and satisfaction: the natural tendency of the poor, rent, derived spirit, towards the Fountain of spirits".

¶ The natural and common heritage of love and faith is a theme that is dear to Julian; in her view, longing toward God is grounded in the love to Him that is native to the human heart, and this longing (painful through sin) as it is stirred by the Holy Spirit who comes with Christ, is, in each naturally developed Christian, spontaneous and increasing; "for the nearer we be to our bliss, the more we long after it".[2]

¶ You don't suppose that the insight with which a poet's mind is endowed is just his ordinary reasoning powers? It is something different—it is contact with a spirit greater than his own. If the aspiration is theirs, amounting to nothing more than a sensation, it is sufficient to produce that aim at assimilation that is called prayer. It is the same sort of thing that makes a plant force its way through a crevice to get the sun's rays.[3]

My inmost soul, O Lord, to Thee
  Leans like a growing flower
Unto the light. I do not know
  The day nor blessed hour
When that deep-rooted, daring growth
  We call the heart's desire

[1] Herbert Branston Gray, *Modern Laodiceans*, 83.

[2] Grace Warrack, in Introduction to Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of the Divine Love*, xxxiv.

[3] *George Frederick Watts*, ii. 174.

Shall burst and blossom to a prayer
Within the sacred fire
Of Thy great patience; grow so pure,
So still, so sweet a thing
As perfect prayer must surely be.
And yet my heart will sing
Because Thou seem'st sometimes so near,
Close-present God! to me.
It seems I could not have a wish
That was not shared by Thee;
It seems I cannot be afraid
To speak my longings out,
So tenderly Thy gathering love
Enfolds me round about;
It seems as if my heart would break,
If, living on the light,
I should not lift to Thee at last
A bud of flawless white.
And yet, O helpless heart! how sweet
To grow, and bud, and say:
The flower, however marred or wan,
Shall not be cast away.[1]

4. This Godward desire is a reflex of the Divine desire itself. The faith which steals in at prayer-time is the tacit assurance—though we may not put it in so many words—that our prayer is the real expression of Divine desire working within us. And what greater encouragement than this can visit the soul of man? That prayer is the reflex in man of the Divine desire itself is expressly assumed in the words of Jesus: "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark xi. 24, A.V.). For here, surely, is meant not merely human desire—whether of the heathen burglar who prays for riches obtained illicitly, or of the law-abiding poor man who prays for riches in the course of honourable trading, or of suppliants all and sundry who pray for any boon which may make their lives dignified, comfortable and shadow-free; else were human desire, when directed towards the highest deity known, the ultimate ruling-force in the universe—an anomaly which the Lord Jesus never meant to suggest. Rather must we believe that He had in mind desires that are begotten of God, and that

[1] Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.

kind of "believing" also which is given of God—a sign-manual that the desire within corresponds to the Desire enthroned above. Given this state, then faith is the hand stretched out to grasp the proffered gift. And it has been verily so, with large result, as generations of godly souls have abundantly testified.

¶ Oh plain, and easy, and simple way of salvation! wanting no subtleties of art or science, no borrowed learning, no refinements of reason, but all done by the simple natural motion of every heart that truly longs after God. For no sooner is the finite desire of the creature in motion towards God, but the infinite desire of God is united with it, co-operates with it. And in this united desire of God, and the creature, is the salvation and life of the soul brought forth.[1]

¶ Enthusiasm born of numbers may simulate the true faith that is normally born in the secret chamber, in one soul or more secluded with God. But even then it becomes a great impulse towards daring venture for what is esteemed the cause of God. The Council of Clermont met in the year 1095 to consider the project of a great crusade against the Turks, and broke up amid unanimous shouts of *Deus id vult*, which became the battle-cry of that First Crusade. In surer manner, if in humbler fashion, a godly labouring man of a certain English town was wont to relate his answers to prayer, adding the words: "I said to myself, this 'ere is God's will, and my will, so I just claim it". He had learned the logic of faith, based on the essentials of all true prayer—the coincidence of Divine and human desire.[2]

II.

Prayer is Communion.

True prayer is something more than desire. It is no mere subjective instinct—no blind outreach. If it met no response, no answer, it would soon be weeded out of the race. It would shrivel like the functionless organ. We could not long continue to pray in faith if we lost the assurance that there is a Person who cares, and who actually corresponds with us. Prayer has stood the test of experience. In fact the very desire to pray is in itself prophetic of a Heavenly Friend. A subjective need always carries an implication of an objective stimulus which has

[1] W. Law, *The Spirit of Prayer*, 87.

[2] W. A. Cornaby, *Prayer and the Human Problem*, 178.

provoked the need. There is no hunger, as Fiske has well shown, for anything not tasted; there is no search for anything which is not in the environment, for the environment has always produced the appetite. So this native need of the soul rose out of the Divine origin of the soul, and it has steadily verified itself as a safe guide to reality.

Prayer is thus the psychological act by which the soul seeks and finds contact, conscious contact, or communion, with God. In the first instance it is not asking for anything, it is not petition; all it seeks is God Himself. When it makes a request, there is always a preface: Let me find Thee, let me know Thee, then I will ask of Thee. Francis of Assisi, we are told, would frequently spend an hour or two in prayer on Monte Alverno, and the only word he would say would be "God," repeated at intervals. That is prayer, bare, elemental, essential prayer.

Look at Jesus, remaining through the long hours, in tranquillity of spirit, with God. Is not the central reality of His prayer, and therefore of prayer in its perfect meaning, in this: this which includes and transcends alike the petition of need, and the stress of battle; this inner communing, thought to thought, with God; this reflection of spirit in Spirit; this perfecting of character in reciprocal intercourse; this shaping, in mutual converse, of mind, meaning, and will; this response of love to love; this unveiledness of face; this reflecting, as a mirror, of the being of God; this transfiguration, wherein man, as man, becomes himself a very image of God, growing progressively from glory to glory, which is indeed the proper fruit of the Spirit—the Spirit which is the Lord?

¶ To pray for everything just means to have fellowship with the Father in everything.[1]

¶ I understand that when our spirits are attuned to the Spirit of Righteousness, our hopes and aspirations exert an influence far beyond their conscious range, and in a true sense bring us into communion with our Heavenly Father. This power of filial communion is called prayer; it is an attitude of mingled worship and supplication: we offer petitions in a spirit of trust and submission, and endeavour to realize the Divine attributes, with the help and example of Christ.[2]

[1] M. Kähler, *Berechtigung und Zuversichtlichkeit des Bittgebets.*

[2] O. Lodge, *The Substance of Faith*, 116.

¶ When I stir thee to prayer is to stir thee not to the prayer which standeth in many words but to that prayer which in the secret chamber of the mind, in the privy closet of the soul with very affect speaketh to God, and in the most lightsome darkness of contemplation not only presenteth the mind to the Father: but also uniteth it with Him by unspeakable ways which only they know that have assayed. Nor I care not how long or how short thy prayer be, but how effectual, how ardent, and rather interrupted and broken between with sighs than drawn on length with a continual row and number of words.[1]

1. There is perhaps in this communion at first only a vague feeling after companionship, which remains in many persons vague to the end. But in others it frequently rises to a definite consciousness of a personal Presence, and there comes back into the soul a compelling evidence of a real Other Self who meets all the soul's need. For such persons prayer is the way to fulness of life. It is as natural as breathing. It is as normal an operation as appreciation of beauty or the pursuit of truth. The soul is made that way, and as long as men are made with mystical deeps within, unsatisfied with the finite and incomplete, they will pray and be refreshed.

Vague and formless, in some degree, communion would always be apart from the personal manifestation of God in Jesus Christ. As soon as God is known as Father, as soon as we turn to Him as identical in being with our own humanity, as suffering with us and loving us even in our imperfection, this communion grows defined and becomes *actual social fellowship*, which is prayer at its best. St. Paul's great prayers of fellowship rise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God whom we know, because He has been humanly revealed in a way that fits our life. We turn to Him as the completeness and reality of all we want to be, the other Self whom we have always sought. The vague impulse to reach beyond our isolated and solitary self gives place to an actual experience of relationship with a personal Friend and Companion, and this experience may become, and often does become, the loftiest and most joyous activity of life.

¶ Prayer is the ethical and religious act in which the fellowship of the believing man and Christian with his God finds its

[1] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

strongest and most specific expression, and by which this fellowship is most profoundly realized and furthered.[1]

¶ This fact of communion with the Father breaks clean through that mechanical view of the world which turns it into a dead world; for it means that God is doing the wonderful new free thing of conversing with His human child, and is being answered by His child's faith. Such prayer, such genuine fellowship with God, is something which laughs at fate and its rigidities, and to see it so is to breathe a higher, freer air, in which the universe takes on the better aspect of a real training-ground for Divine sonship. It is a universe in which God is free to speak with man.[2]

2. Communion implies sympathy, and if sympathy is present it makes little difference what is actually said or thought. You may meet a man and say to him merely that the day is fine, but if you have said it with sympathy you have had communion with him. On the other hand, you may have talked long with him and on high topics, but if it has been without sympathy there has been no communion. The sympathy need not find utterance at all. Animals do not talk, and yet they like to be together; and it is pleasant to sit by one's friend, though he and you may speak no word to each other for many minutes. Now if we raise all this to the highest point, it may help to show what communion is like between man and God, and it will be seen that, given the communion, the sympathy, the form or subject of one's prayer will matter little; the soul may be trusted to pour itself out in its sense of sympathy and submission. The poor serving-woman who can understand hardly a word of the Latin service has the sense of the Divine Presence and lays open before it her life with all its needs.

¶ We may find a very homely but pertinent parallel illustration in men's treatment of animals, and though the illustration may seem belittling yet we must remember that the difference in rank between animals and men is infinitely less than between men and God. About the only way men know to tame and domesticate animals, that is to say, to bring them into a measure of fellowship with themselves, is precisely this same method of making some good gift to the animal contingent on its asking for

[1] J. Köstlin, *Christliche Ethik*, 247.
[2] H. R. Mackintosh, *Studies in Christian Truth*, 28.

it, or coming into some contact with the man. When the farmer takes a vessel of corn or salt or other delicacy to the pasture with him to induce his farm animals to come fearlessly to him, it may be true that the shy ones that don't come fail to get something that would have been good for them, and it is certainly true that those that come get something by their coming which they would not have got if they had not come; but still there was no violation there of the orderly laws of that farm's management. There is no putting of the will of a silly animal above the will and wisdom of the wise owner. It is not a makeshift to patch up a defect in the efficiency of the system of farm feeding. Nor is it necessarily a plan to enable certain favoured animals to live better than others and better than they could by the unaided working of the ordinary farm management. The one object is fellowship, or in common language to make those animals tame, friendly, and not afraid of him. Precisely such is the nature of the institution which we call prayer. Its object is to domesticate men to God's household, to induce them to voluntarily come to God without fear and engage in fellowship with Him.[1]

3. Communion with God also implies submission to His will. It is in communion that man most truly realizes himself by making himself most truly an organ in the self-fulfilment of God. So to ask whether prayer is effective is like asking whether it is effective to be alive unto God, effective to realize one's true being and to fulfil one's Divine vocation. In fact it is only when we fall unconsciously into the mistake of regarding prayer as something external to the communion of the Christian man with God—or into the still more radical mistake of regarding that communion itself as something external to the essential life of humanity and of nature—that we raise this question of the effectiveness of prayer at all. It is like asking whether it is effective for reality to be real, or for life to live. The essential will of the Christian man is that in all the ways of the world God may fulfil Himself; in pursuance of that will, the Christian man gives his loyalty to those causes of human welfare in which the heart of man gradually has been learning to articulate and make definite its longing for God and for good. When such a man brings before God all things of his life—all the things his heart fears, all the things his heart desires—the doubt is not whether such prayer is effective; the doubt is whether there is in the world any other permanently

[1] D. A. Murray, *Christian Faith and the New Psychology*, 292.

effective force than such prayer and the life that is lived in the spirit of such prayer.

¶ Regarding prayer not so much as consisting of particular acts of devotion, but as the spirit of life, it seems to be the spirit of harmony with the will of God. It is the aspiration after all good, the wish, stronger than any earthly passion or desire, to live in His service only. It is the temper of mind which says in the evening, "Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit"; which rises up in the morning "To do thy will, O God"; and which all the day regards the actions of business and of daily life unto the Lord and not to men—"Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God". The trivial employments, the meanest or lowest occupations, may receive a kind of dignity when thus converted into the service of God. Other men live for the most part in dependence on the opinion of their fellow-men; they are the creatures of their own interests, they hardly see anything clearly in the mists of their own self-deceptions. But he whose mind is resting in God rises above the petty aims and interests of men; he desires only to fulfil the Divine will, he wishes only to know the truth. His "eye is single," in the language of Scripture, and his whole body is full of light. The light of truth and disinterestedness flows into his soul; the presence of God, like the sun in the heavens, warms his heart. Such a one, whom I have imperfectly described, may be no mystic; he may be one among us whom we know not, undistinguished by any outward mark from his fellow-men, yet carrying within him a hidden source of truth and strength and peace.[1]

4. We enter into communion with God at His own invitation. Prayer is our conscious response, as free beings, to God's invitation, the effort on our part to enter into that intercourse with God which He on His part desires us to have. It is therefore miserably misconceived by its critical opponents, when represented as a mere petition for favours. For it is something infinitely wider and more important than this. It is the affirmation of our social nature, seeking its only adequate end in union with the absolute and permanent source of all society. Hence prayer is as many-sided as life, and as all-embracing as faith, for it is faith in action. And its human analogue is not petition, but intercourse with a friend. Primarily, we desire such intercourse

[1] Benjamin Jowett.

as an end in itself, simply because our friend is our friend, and the fact of converse with him manifests and satisfies our friendship. And then we tell him our thoughts and seek his criticism and approval of them; we discuss our plans with him and ask his advice; we express our affection, our admiration, our gratitude towards him for his friendship; we invite him to share our joys, and seek his sympathy with our sorrows.

And God responds. For prayer is nothing at all except as on the one side there is a human "I," on the other a Divine "Thou," and living fellowship between the two. This is a matter on which there can be no dispute. What could speech mean if there were no one to listen and to reply? But more, the man who prays is conscious, be it dimly or clearly, that his prayer has been drawn from him by Another's influence. Some creative hand touched him, stirring the sense of need, claiming his trust; then he began to pray, sure amid all other uncertainties that it is best for children to speak out their requirements to the father, notwithstanding that the father may know already what their requirements are. Real fellowship with the living God—not make-believe about it, or keeping up a familiar but useless habit—this is prayer.

¶ What is prayer? It is, when we comprehend it in its deepest and most peculiar significance, a dialogue between our innermost self and Almighty God, a real and true experience. It is an uplifting of the human soul to the highest reality, God condescending and bending towards the individual human soul. It is a mystery of whose deepest and innermost truth and splendour we are, perhaps, fully conscious only at rare moments in our lives.[1]

¶ There is a direct and mutual communion of spirit with spirit between ourselves and God, in which He receives our affection and gives a responsive breathing of His inspiration. Such communion appears to me as certain a reality as the daily intercourse between man and man; resting upon evidence as positive, and declaring itself by results as marked. The disposition to throw doubt on the testimony of those who affirm that they know this is a groundless prejudice, an illusion on the negative side as complete as the most positive dreams of enthusiasm. At least, unless something better can be urged against the doctrine of prayer than the commonplaces about the fixity of natural

[1] W. Bousset, *The Faith of a Modern Protestant*, 60.

laws, I must profess I know of nothing in the constitution of this universe at all at variance with our natural faith in a personal intercourse with God, in His openness to our appeal and our susceptibility to His spirit.[1]

5. Taking prayer as inter-communion between God and ourselves, we can understand how by it our knowledge of God can be enormously deepened and extended. We get to know our friends better by conversation and familiar intercourse. And so we shall get to know God better by conversing with Him. But we are very apt to forget that if conversation is to do this work it must not be one-sided, and our ordinary conversation with God is terribly one-sided. We insist on doing all the talking ourselves; we go straight through our prayers, almost without drawing breath, and then get up and go away, without leaving a moment to God in which He may talk to us. It is no wonder that such prayers do not much advance our knowledge of Him to whom we speak, and to whom we refuse to listen. We must make pauses in our prayers, during which we wait for God's answer to come, whether it be in the form of reproof or comfort or instruction; whether it come as illumination to the mind or strength and courage to the heart. If we would only converse humbly and modestly with God, instead of merely giving Him detailed information of things which He knows already, prayer would be a far more effective agent in Divine knowledge than we find it to be at present. In particular, our knowledge of God would become more personal. We should go away with a knowledge of Him in His personal nature, as revealed in what He speaks to our soul, and with an experience of His power and readiness to satisfy our personal needs and aspirations.

¶ The last and highest result of prayer is not the securing of this or that gift, the avoiding of this or that danger. The last and highest result of prayer is the knowledge of God—the knowledge which is eternal life; and by that knowledge the transformation of human character and of the world.[2]

[1] J. Martineau, *Hours of Thought*, ii. 224.
[2] G. J. Blewett, *The Christian View of the World*, 249.

III.

Prayer is Petition.

1. Although prayer has been defined as communion with God, as aspiration after the highest things, Stopford Brooke is right when he insists that prayer in its plainest meaning is a petition addressed to God. Take the element of petition out of prayer, and prayer may be a wholesome exercise of the soul or a spiritual energy of the life, but it ceases to be what we mean by prayer. Prayer with Jesus was straightforward and unhesitating petition, asking God to do something, and believing that He would do it. And when Jesus laid the duty of petition upon His disciples, He went on to assert the reasonableness of a man asking and of God answering, by that argument from man to God which he loved to use and which is thoroughly scientific. If a child in an earthly home were hungry he would turn by an instinct to his parents, and if he asked bread would the father give the child a stone? Impossible, because it would be contrary to nature; and if you could imagine a state of affairs where the offspring, whether birds in a nest or infants in a home, received stones instead of food from their parents, you would have a topsy-turvy world. Jesus therefore argues along the line of reason, that if an earthly parent, although from his limitations often foolish and sometimes evil, yet does the best in his power for his children, will not the Almighty and All-wise Love, of which human love is only the shadow, do better still for His great family? And therefore our Master teaches that men ought everywhere to pray without fear and without doubt.

Again, if we build our argument for the effectiveness of prayer upon the common consent of mankind, we must be prepared to accept the common consent of mankind as to what has been intended by prayer. Now, beyond question, what has been intended has been petition. The cry that has gone up from innumerable souls through all the ages, pagan and Christian, has been a cry for some kind of good, or for deliverance from some kind of evil, addressed to a higher Power which, it was hoped, could be moved to give the good, or to ward off the evil. It is prayer in this sense to which the deep instinct and long habit of the soul have borne witness.

Thus, although petition is not the whole of prayer, it is a legitimate and necessary part of it. This results from the fact that both in the individual and in society the Christian life is still incomplete. We are conscious that we ourselves are not yet what in God's plan we ought to be, and no genuine speaking to God can ignore the fact. So with praise and thanksgiving go inevitably the petitions for forgiveness of sins and deliverance from temptation. Again, when we seek to follow Christ in labour for His Kingdom, we are aware of a thousand obstacles which thwart, and often seem utterly to defeat, our efforts. So prayer that is natural and sincere must ever include as one of its elements the petition that these obstacles may be removed and God's Kingdom may come.

¶ A devoted Christian rejoices in his privilege of offering petitions to God and, in spite of objections to petitionary prayer, makes thankful use of this privilege. In trustful surrender of himself to God he knows that all the needs, tasks, and straits, under which he must assert and prove himself as an ethical personality and Christian come from God, and in his humility, he is well aware that, in order thus to prove himself, he needs God's help every moment. He cherishes this consciousness with regard to his natural life and its maintenance, and more especially with regard to the needs and tasks of his inner man, that guilt which still oppresses him and that moral weakness which still cleaves to him. Many who depreciate petitionary prayer, simply trusting in God, as they say, really do so because they are confident in the enjoyment of a more fortunate eternal life which God has granted them, and in the consciousness of their own moral strength, which is due to the lack of earnest self-examination. It is an inner impulse that leads the Christian to petition, and he follows this impulse in thankful trust in the answer promised him. He does not, however, let his petitions be determined by merely selfish interests and inclinations, but seeks to obtain that which will further his true weal. Indeed, it is God's highest ethical aims which his praying, like his working and endeavouring, must directly or indirectly serve. He is God's fellow-worker.[1]

¶ I have been much struck of late in reading several books on this subject, to note how one writer after another judges it needful to warn his readers against the idea that prayer is no more than

[1] J. Köstlin, *Christliche Ethik*, 254.

petition. What they say is, of course, true; prayer is much more than petition. But, unless I misread the signs of the times, this is not the warning which just now we most need to hear. Rather do we need to be told that prayer is more than communion, that petition, simple asking that we may obtain, is a part, and a very large part, of prayer. "Who rises from prayer a better man," says George Meredith, "his prayer is answered." This is true, but it is far from being the whole truth.[1]

¶ Mahometanism is a creed without sacrifice, without mystery, and (so far as I am informed on this point) without prayer; its deep-rooted fatalism leaves no room for the pleading human voice of supplication; its only language is that of acquiescence in that "inexorable will which it calls God". Deism also adores and acquiesces, it does not *pray*. "I accustom my mind," says Rousseau, "to sublime contemplations. I meditate upon the order of the universe, not for the sake of reducing it to vain systems, but to admire it unceasingly, to adore the wise Creator who makes Himself felt within it. I converse with the Author of the universe; I imbue all my faculties with His Divine essence. My heart melts over His benefits. I bless Him for all His gifts, but I do not pray to Him. What have I to ask Him for?"[2]

2. Not only are the subjective effects of prayer very much heightened when due place is given in prayer to petition, but with petition eliminated there would be less communion with God than there is. Not that one goes to God only when one has a petition to offer (for there is much communion without petition), but if a man had any sort of assurance that such approach of the soul to God as communion involves was being made to a Supreme Being whose ear was deaf and whose heart was indifferent to our cries of distress and our petitions for help, or, hearing, could not help us, because of the inevitable course of things over which He has no control, the probability is that that man would soon begin to incline towards a state of dumb resignation to the inevitable, which in turn would rapidly tend towards the neglect of prayer altogether. We pray too little as it is. If with Frederick W. Robertson we see in prayer only such contemplation of the character of God as ends with the resignation of ourselves to His will, most men, we fear, would not put themselves even to such effort to obtain it. They would be more likely to accept

[1] G. Jackson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, 154. [2] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 120.

the inevitable and devote the time otherwise required for such contemplation to making the best out of a condition of affairs for which there is no help, at least from above. But, on the contrary, to know that God hears our cry for help as well as our voice in praise and thanksgiving and confession, and that like as a father He not only pitieth His children but, having the power, He gives them what would not be theirs but for the asking, then are we constrained to come to Him, not alone with our petitions but with the expression of grateful hearts; then are we drawn into His presence by that very fact, not only in the hour of special need but continually, even as with the closest friend.

3. It is for experience to decide whether prayer is of practical use, and it is always better to depend upon expert witnesses—to hear Darwin rather than a gardener on the variation of plants; Lord Kelvin rather than a telegraphist on the properties of electricity; and the saints rather than amateur critics of religion on prayer. One turns to Abraham, who interceded for Sodom, to Jacob, who wrestled with the angel until the day broke, to Moses, who in the darkness of Sinai obtained God's mercy for his nation, to Elijah, who opened and sealed the heavens by prayer, and to the unknown poets who gave us the matchless liturgy of the Psalms. One appeals in later days to St. Paul, whose letters break off at great moments into petition, to St. John, who in the vision of prayer beheld the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to our Lord Himself, who spent whole nights in prayer upon the lonely mountain side. One remembers in modern times the multitude of believing men who have wrought marvels by prayer; how the more Martin Luther had to do, the more he prayed; how Cromwell on his death-bed interceded for God's cause and God's people in the finest prayer ever offered by a patriot; how it was written of "the Saints of the Covenant" in Scotland that they lived "praying and preaching," and that they died "praying and fighting". Time would fail to tell how the saints of the Church and the champions of God's cause have prayed; but we should remember what was said by Lord Salisbury of Mr. Gladstone, that he was "a great Christian statesman"; and that brilliant statesman drew his strength from the springs of prayer. What possessed those men that they undertook no work till they had

first met with God, that they turned unto Him in every hour of defeat, that they carried to His feet the trophies of their victories? Was all this pure waste of time and sheer delusion of soul, and were they—the men who have known most about religion—simply deceived when they testified of religion's chief act? Is this credible?

¶ When Queen Victoria was opening the Town Hall of Sheffield she had put into her hand a little golden key, and she was told as she sat in her carriage that she only had to turn the golden key and in a moment the Town Hall gates of Sheffield would fly open. In obedience to the authority of experts who gave her the directions, she turned the golden key, and in a moment, by the action of electric wires, the Town Hall gates of Sheffield flew open. Exactly in the same way Jesus Christ must know one thing, if He knows anything, and that is, what opens heaven's gates. He must know that; He must know what key it is which opens heaven's gates; and in His teaching He reiterated over and over again, as if He thought that this was one of the things we should find it hardest to believe, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you". And I say that if we are justified in believing in the Divinity of Christ, then we are justified in going a step further, and saying that His authority is good enough to make us believe that the golden key of prayer, if we use it, will open the gates of heaven.[1]

4. But we can go further. As we look back over the history of the world, we cannot help being struck by the fact that the men of prayer are the men of power. There is a connexion in history between prayer and power. Take, for instance, the great reformer of the past century, who was able to break down the most determined opposition to his reforms, and to free the little children of England from terrible slavery—Lord Shaftesbury. What was the secret of his supernatural power? If we read his life we shall see. That man was praying continually. He was praying in the House of Commons before he made his speeches; he was praying in everything he did. It would not be intelligent reading of biography to disconnect his prayer from his power. Or take General Gordon, who left us the record of a stainless soldier who could stand alone. What gave him the strength to do it? Here, again, we cannot intelligently disconnect his extra-

[1] Bishop Winnington Ingram, *Banners of the Christian Faith*, 67.

ordinary power, his extraordinary personal influence, from the white handkerchief outside his tent, so regularly placed there two or three times a day, which meant that General Gordon was at his prayers. Continuous prayer brings personal power.

¶ It is a wonderful historical fact that the men of prayer have always been the men of power in the world. I want to convince you about this. Some of you men—and I am glad to see such a large number of men here to-night—if you are arguing with some friend in the workshop, be sure and ask him why it is that the men of prayer in the world have been the men of power. Take only one instance. Where did they always go to find men for the forlorn hope in Havelock's days? They went to Havelock's prayer meeting; that is where they found men who had the courage to come out for the forlorn hope.[1]

[1] Bishop Winnington Ingram, *The Call of the Father*, 75.

III.

ADDRESS AND ADORATION.

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ADDRESS AND ADORATION.

WORSHIP, whether private or public, should aim at completeness. It should embrace the several great leading acts of devotion. There should be Adoration, Confession, Petition, Intercession, and Thanksgiving.

1. The question is sometimes raised whether Adoration or Confession should come first. Public prayer in the Church of England begins with Confession. And this, says Bishop Walsham How, seems right and natural. "A child who has offended its father would naturally go and ask forgiveness before seeking new favours. The Reformers, acting upon this view, and going back to the very earliest accounts we have of Christian worship, added the penitential portion (that is, all preceding the Lord's Prayer) at the beginning of the Daily Morning and Evening Prayer; and for this we owe them a deep debt of gratitude. It seems well that our private prayer should follow the same order, and begin with Confession. This is especially needful at night, when we pass in review the day which is over, with all its sins and infirmities. Surely we should never be content to lie down at night without a humble and penitent confession of the sins of the day past. Let this be the first act of our evening devotion, and all the rest will be far more blessed. We shall feel we are speaking to a Father from whom we have sought and won pardon and acceptance."[1]

But in order that Adoration may not be lost sight of, since the mind is so apt to pass directly from Confession to Petition, it is usually recommended that, at least in private and family prayer, Adoration should come first. The essential element in our approach to God must be confession of sin and prayer for pardon. No reasonable worship can proceed otherwise. But it is natural,

[1] W. W. How, *Plain Words*, iv. 15.

and indeed inevitable, that it should be prefaced by a solemn invocation of Almighty God, whose pardoning grace is to be sought through Jesus Christ, and that the prayer for pardon and peace should be accompanied by some comforting and strengthening word of promise, whereby the souls of the worshippers may be assured that the pardon sincerely sought is as truly and really given.

¶ "Adoration," it has been truly said, "must be the basis of true thanksgiving and praise and prayer; it is the fitting acknowledgment of our real relations with God which should precede them." But if it is real it will not only precede, it will accompany and pervade, them. So when we pass from invocation to confession, in which the glance of the soul is towards God but also towards self, there will still be present this sense of the greatness of God, this sense of the emptiness and insignificance of self which impels us to prostrate ourselves in spirit before Him. The same will hold true when from confession we pass to the prayer for pardon and peace, to a renewal of our dedication, and to supplications for God's grace. Like a thread of gold this spiritual chain will unite them all, so that from first to last these varying efforts of the soul will be one—a solemn act of adoration, a humble yet daring venture to pass into the very presence of God, and to claim, as our right in Christ and through Him, communion with the Father.[1]

2. Prayer, in the narrow sense of petition, divides itself into petition for self and petition for others, the latter being generally known as Intercession. Plainly a large part of our worship must consist of these. The first and simplest idea of worship is asking God for what we need. Therefore it is unnecessary to dwell further upon this. It is probable that all who pray at all do make request both for themselves and for others.

Thanksgiving is very frequently mingled with Adoration, yet they are distinct acts, and should be kept distinct, or at least should be distinctly borne in mind, so that, even if intermingled, neither should be omitted. Thanksgiving differs from Adoration in that, while the latter contemplates God's glory and God's goodness in themselves, the former regards these as displayed in His mercies to us. Adoration is the homage of the creature to the Creator; thanksgiving of the benefited to the Benefactor.

[1] A. W. Williamson, *Ideals of Ministry*, 88.

Let there be, then, in our devotions a distinct act of grateful recollection of mercies received, both ordinary and special.

3. It is well worth observing how these different parts of prayer are comprehended in the precept, "Pray without ceasing," and thus are to be found in the ordinary experience of a true Christian life.

(1) What is every consciousness of the presence of Jesus Christ to the believing soul but Adoration? The seasons of such consciousness are very contrasted. To one man it is the manifestation of a Saviour with open hands in the mercy and blessing of the life that now is: prosperity is about him, and the cares and temptations of riches beset him. To another it is in the darkness of a dispensation that has been brought by adversity, bereavement, losses, afflictions of every sort, which can be resolved only at the hands of a Saviour concealed by a cloud. But in whatever form He appears, Christian faith perceives the Christ who reveals Himself. All absence of adoration in this world, whether it takes the form of material infidelity, or cold deism, or critical rationalism, is only blindness towards a real Christ. It is not possible that He should be driven, exorcised from the world He has formed, and the people He has redeemed. Men who will close their eyes to Him, and who will not seek Him, have no adoration to present, because there is no recognition of Him in their experience. He in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell—He, the first and the last, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—stands recognized by His people, though scoffed at by opposers, discriminating men in their different relations to Himself, and determining their destiny and responsibility by this solitary test. He that perceives Christ every day is continually engaged in adoration.

(2) The second part of a true prayer is Confession. What is every sense of sin in the soul of a trusting disciple but this penitent acknowledgment before God our Saviour? Never does there come to us a conviction of guilt but it is associated with the promise of pardon and deliverance. True Christian repentance does not lead to despair, but instantly rings the chimes of hope in the soul. We look out from our consciousness of guilt to a God and Saviour who abundantly pardons and restrains. The

very condition of Christian faith is this acknowledgment of sin in the presence of Him who has become a complete Redeemer. Though not a word of confession be spoken, though not a syllable be framed, he who lives burdened by his own unworthiness, and yet eager in spirit to name his Redeemer, is continually confessing his sin. It may be in the worldly duties of living, it may be in the seasons of worship, it may be as he listens to the Word; but that spirit which is in close communion with its Redeemer turns even involuntarily, by a new power given to it in regeneration, towards this Saviour, with a confession of its undesert.

(3) The third part of a true prayer is Petition or Supplication; and it follows immediately that every sense of personal infirmity, every pressure of want, is instantly referred by the believer to a Lord who cares for him, and who has commanded him to cast his care upon a care-taking God. The Psalmist expresses it under these different illustrations: "My soul gaspeth as a thirsty land; my soul panteth after God as the wearied and heated stag for the water-courses". The very expression of the experience of need becomes a petition for supply. No sooner do I acknowledge that I want anything than it is recognized in heaven as a supplication for that which supplies that need. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst." To know that to need grace is to pray for grace. To know that you are helpless without the Divine succour extended to you is itself the lifting up of holy hands for the extending of such Divine relief. A sense of want is a yearning and prayer, because accompanied by faith in the abundance of Christ's promise. St. Paul carries out this thought in the catalogue of contradictions, when in substance he says, I am weak, but yet I am strong; in myself I have nothing, yet I have all things in the Christ who undertakes for me.

(4) But again, every exercise of sympathy and love is Intercession. We are unselfish just in the measure of our human love. We reach out towards those who have been given us in the providence of God, and then beyond the home, as love becomes less selfish, to those who are in want and friendless, and then beyond still to those that are outcast and rejected, until, in the true experience of Christian love, our intercession embraces a world lying in the wicked one. What will not a faithful parent or

friend do, endure, or give, in the measure of his experience and love? The sick-room, the risks taken in the counting-rooms of our cities, the acts of charity and benevolence in our streets and throughout the homes of our poor—all these are illustrations and exhibitions of a love active in its demonstrations. It would be a happy thing if in our living it were true that, though our love at home is prudent and well devised in its measures and methods, it did not always stay at home, but could reach out towards those that are in need, not of luxuries, but of the very necessaries of body and of soul. Just as we have this human love towards our own and towards those that are about us, coupled with our trust in Christ, does every sense of sympathy and every desire of affection become intercession. Possessing this interest in the inestimable gift of Christ, we begin to look at every child and every friend we have with a perhaps unuttered but yet a perfect intercession, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before God!" Every interest taken in the sick, the sorrowing, the poor, the afflicted, will instantly change into an act of intercession to the great Physician and the faithful Friend who alone can relieve; so that wherever such a loving soul can send a thought, he can send a blessing. As our heart is enlarged, so do our intercessions become wider and wider in their outreach.

(5) And then, all gratitude in Christian life is expressed in Thanksgiving. In its very nature it recognizes a Giver. It traces every blessing back to His hand. It is on the alert to appreciate all the mercies, little and great, bitter and sweet. True gratitude is conscious of undesert, is continually depressed with the fear of infirmity and failure, but is equally satisfied with love and carefulness. It matters little what may be the shape of its manifestations—how God the Father may send His blessing—in wine or in wormwood—it still cries out, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" Gurnall says, "Who that understands himself will value a book by the gilt that is on the cover?" Who that can appreciate the mercy of God will judge it by its external form or appearance? Gratitude is glad, is full of thanksgiving at the beginning of a mercy. It does not wait until it is fully revealed.

I.

The Address.

But before Adoration or Confession, before any of the elements of prayer are even begun, there is a great matter to be attended to in all prayer. It is the name of Him to whom prayer is to be made. How do we address God when we approach Him in prayer? What name do we give to God when we pray to Him? What do we call Him? When we pray, what do we say? Jesus bids us say "Father"—"When ye pray, say, Father" (Luke xi. 2, R.V.). Do we say "Father" when we pray?

It is not a matter of no moment. Jesus never commanded things of no moment. It seems to be in the line of God's discipline. If we may follow the history of redemption as it is at present set forth in the Old Testament (and whatever criticism may discover as to dates and documents, the present arrangement of the Old Testament seems purposely made for edification), there appear to be stages of progress marked by the use of the name of God. There appears to be three great steps.

At first when men prayed, they seem to have simply said "God". This continued down to the time of Moses and the deliverance from Egypt. Then the name "Jehovah" was revealed. Never mind whether it was used already, according to our documents, or not. Never mind where it came from. The Old Testament was written for our edification, and in the process of edifying us it seems to reveal to us that at the recovery of Israel from the bondage of Egypt to serve the living God this name was given. Henceforth, when an Israelite prayed, he said "Jehovah". Long after the Exodus, looking back on all the way, the pious Israelite could say, "Jehovah, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations". But when Jesus came, He said "When ye pray, say, Father". And that is our name for God. That is the name in all *our* generations.

Some still say "God". To say "God" is to think of Him chiefly as Creator and Preserver. It is to put Him, perhaps, somewhat far away. It is to make Him somewhat doubtful. George Eliot has a woman in *Silas Marner*, a churchgoer and Christian, who never ventured nearer than "Them as are above

us". And there is a story which, though it be not true in particular, is perfectly true in general, that an infidel took to praying once because he feared the ship was sinking, and said, "O God, if there be a God". That is the danger of saying "God". We almost add "if there be a God". But they that come to God must believe that He is.

It is better to say "Jehovah". For Jehovah is nearer and surer. If it is not so evident that He is the God of all the Earth, it is certain that He is the God of Israel. And we have entered into that inheritance. When Moses went down into Egypt he took this Name with him. He took other things besides this. He took the wonder-working rod. It was wonderful to see the rod turn into a serpent when Moses threw it on the ground. But the rod did not make the deepest impression upon the people who were crying by reason of the bondage. "When they heard that Jehovah had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped."

And in all their generations thereafter Jehovah was their God. What is their secret? They gave us our Bible. They gave us our Religion. They gave us our Saviour. Other nations have offered us Bibles, Religions, and even Saviours, but we will not have them. Egypt offers us its Book of the Dead. The Book of the Dead? It is the book of a dead nation; we are not interested in it. Greece offers the world a religion—the gods of hoary Olympus, and the goddesses; but the world has been amused at it or ashamed. What is Israel's secret? The secret of Israel is Jehovah. The prophets lisped "Jehovah" at their mothers' knee; and they came to Israel and said, "When ye pray, say Jehovah". That is the secret of the history of Israel.

But the best name is "Father". Jehovah came with the tabernacle and went with the temple. When the temple was ready to depart, Jesus met a woman of Samaria. "Our fathers," she said, "worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." It depends *on whom* men worship. No doubt Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship Jehovah. But "the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father".

"Father" is best. For "Father" is as wide as "God" and as near as "Jehovah". As wide as God? Surely. "The Father of all men"—we have good Scripture for it. And yet as near as Jehovah. For, though it is true that God loved and loves the world, yet says Jesus, "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him". There is a wider circle of love and there is a nearer. He is "the Father of all men, but especially of them that believe". And in that "especially" lies a great difference.[1]

¶ The Divine names in the 86th Psalm are very frequent and significant, and the order in which they are used is evidently intentional. We have the great Covenant name of Jehovah set in the very first verse, and in the last verse; as if to bind the whole together with a golden circlet. And then, in addition, it appears once in each of the other two sections of the psalm. Then we have, further, the name of God employed in each of the sections; and, further, the name of Lord, which is not the same as Jehovah, but implies the simple idea of superiority and authority. In each portion of the psalm, then, we see the writer laying his hand, as it were, upon these three names—"Jehovah," "my God," "Lord"—and in all of them finding grounds for his confidence and reasons for his cry.

Nothing in our prayers is often more hollow and unreal than the formal repetitions of the syllables of that Divine name, often but to fill a pause in our thoughts. But to "call upon the name of the Lord" means, first and foremost, to bring before our minds the aspects of His great and infinite character, which are gathered together into the name by which we address Him. So when we say "Jehovah!" "Lord!" what we ought to mean is this, that we are gazing upon that majestic, glorious thought of Being, self-derived, self-motived, self-ruled, the Being of Him whose name can only be "I am that I am". Of all other creatures the name is, "I am that I have been made,' or "I am that I became," but of Him the name is, "I am that I am". Nowhere outside of Himself is the reason for His being, nor the law that shapes it, nor the aim to which it tends. And this infinite, changeless Rock is laid for our confidence, Jehovah the Eternal, and Self-subsisting, Self-sufficing one.

There is more than that thought in this wondrous name, for it expresses not only the timeless, unlimited, and changeless Being of God, but also the truth that He has entered into what He

[1] *The Expository Times*, xvii. 101.

deigns to call a Covenant with us men. The name "Jehovah" is the seal of that ancient Covenant, of which, though the form has vanished, the essence abides for ever, and God has thereby bound Himself to us by promises that cannot be abrogated. So when we say, "O Lord," we summon up before ourselves, and grasp as the grounds of our confidence, and we humbly present before Him as the motives, if we may so call them, for His action, His own infinite Being and His covenanted grace.

Then, the same psalm invokes "My God". The name "God" implies, in itself, simply the notion of power to be reverenced. But when we add to it that little word "my" we rise to the wonderful thought that the creature can claim an individual relation to Him, and in some wondrous sense a possession there. The tiny mica flake claims kindred with the Alpine peak from which it fell. The poor, puny hand, that can grasp so little of the material and temporal, can grasp all of God that it needs.

Then, there is the other name, "Lord," which simply expresses illimitable sovereignty, power over all circumstances, creatures, orders of being, worlds, and cycles of ages. Wherever He is He rules, and therefore my prayer can be answered by Him. When a child cries "Mother," it is more than all other petitions. A dear name may be a caress when it comes from loving lips. If we are the kind of Christians that we ought to be, there will be nothing sweeter to us than to whisper to ourselves, and to say to Him, "Abba! Father!" See to it that your calling on the name of the Lord is not formal, but the true apprehension, by a believing mind and a loving heart, of the ineffable and manifold sweetnesses which are hived in His manifold names.[1]

II.

Adoration.

1. In the Lord's Prayer Adoration is the subject of the first petition. "Our Father, which art in heaven; *hallowed be Thy name.*" In Adoration the soul comes to God sensible of His love, majesty, holiness, and infinite greatness; feeling, and seeking more fully to feel, the awe, reverence, and holy affection due to His great name; it transcends admiration and wonder; it is a blending of love with the fervent desire that all the world should know and magnify the glory of the Lord. A poet's frenzy or a scientist's noble enthusiasm may fall far short of this; for to the

[1] A. Maclaren, *The God of the Amen*, 53.

fullest tide of feeling and the highest reach of reason, adoration adds something partaking of personal allegiance. Not in petition or intercession, not in confession or thanksgiving, is found the highest altitudes of worship, but in adoration and consecration. Its act is self-surrender to the King, and its language, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name". Adoration lives not as a separate thing, comes not always to definite expression, but is present in all reverent invocation of God, and flows like a permanent undercurrent in all true prayer. It is often felt when unvoiced, and should make itself heard in all audible prayer as an undertone.

¶ Adoration is the greatest thing in man. Reason is great, calculation is great, imagination and analysis, fused together and compacted year after year by patient thought, present a picture of greatness to which every intellect does homage. But adoration is greater than all. It is when man, in the fullness of all his powers, passes outside himself, passes into the Presence-Chamber of the Great King, and there casts his crown before the throne and worships Him that liveth for ever and ever—it is then that man's greatness reaches its highest point. Self-emptying, self-losing, self-prostrating, is the loftiest outcome of human energies. "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise."[1]

¶ William Law has this very pertinent word in his *Devout Life*: "When you begin your petitions use such various expressions of the attributes of God as may make you most sensible of the greatness and power of the Divine nature". And then William Law gives various examples, which, I am bound to say, would not be helpful to me, as they would imprison my spirit in a coat of mail. But I want to emphasize and commend the principle of it, which is, that our fellowship should begin with the primary elements of adoration and praise.[2]

¶ Begin, therefore, in words like these: "O Being of all beings, Fountain of all light and glory, gracious Father of men and angels, whose universal Spirit is everywhere present giving life and light and joy to all angels in heaven and all creatures upon earth," etc. For these representations of the Divine attributes, which show us, in some degree, the Majesty and Greatness of God, are an excellent means of raising our hearts into

[1] H. M. Butler, *Belief in Christ*, 34.
[2] J. H. Jowett, *The Silver Lining*, 147.

lively acts of worship and adoration. What is the reason that most people are so much affected with this petition in the burial service of our church: "Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death"? It is because the joining together so many great expressions gives such a description of the greatness of the Divine Majesty as naturally affects every sensible mind.[1]

2. Adoration is to be distinguished from Worship, from Praise, from Thanksgiving, and from Admiration.

(1) Adoration differs from worship as being somewhat narrower in its idea and also somewhat more intense. Worship covers the whole range of devotional duty, including its outward order and observances. Adoration takes us, as it were, to the heart and sanctuary of worship. It concentrates and lifts the thought, till it is supremely occupied with those relations between the worshipper and the Worshipped which bring the worshipper spiritually to his knees, bowing his face to the earth, and filling his consciousness full of a sense of the greatness and glory of the Worshipped, and of the worshipper's total dependence upon Him. True, all worship involves in its idea, more or less, the call to revere and to submit. But to adoration that attitude is, in effect, its whole idea.

¶ There is in the heart of every true worshipper a profound sense of humility and self-abasement. Pride, self-righteousness, and self-sufficingness have their source in ignorance of God. The angels of heaven hide their faces in His presence and cast their crowns before His throne, and thus say in effect, "We are not worthy to behold Thy glory; all that we are and have cometh from Thy love; our existence, happiness, dignity, and immortality we owe to Thee." The knowledge of Him and the vision of His glory should produce the same effects in our minds.[2]

(2) Praise is not usually spoken of as prayer, since its expression is always associated with music; but the heart's desire, of which psalm and song are but the utterance, is truly communion with the Eternal. In one respect also praise joins adoration in a contrast over against all other acts of devotion. In confession, petition, and thanksgiving, the worshipper's attitude

[1] William Law, *A Serious Call.* [2] T. Jones, *The Divine Order*, 79.

is that of human need, consciousness of self mingling with the thought of God; but in adoration and in praise it is otherwise; here no thought of self remains, but the spirit soaring on glad wing to God dwells in rapture on His all-glorious perfections; sense of self is lost in that divinest joy a human heart can know. Praise addressed to God in name and memory of Jesus Christ rises inevitably into adoration. Isaiah, transported by faith into the inner sanctuary, was rapt into the worship of the seraphim, and joined in spirit in the unending adoration of the Triune God —"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of thy glory". The herald angels poured forth upon the plains of Bethlehem the song of heaven, "Glory to God in the highest"; and our sad earth heard, and was comforted.

Angels, help us to adore Him;
Ye behold Him face to face!

But even these bright intelligences are unable to show forth all His praise.

¶ No doubt the angels think themselves as insufficient for the praises of the Lord as we do.[1]

¶ It is reported of John Janeway that often in the hour of secret prayer he scarcely knew whether he were "in the body, or out of the body". Tersteegen said to some friends who had gathered round him, "I sit here and talk with you, but within is the eternal adoration, unceasing and undisturbed". Wodrow relates that on one occasion Mr. Carstairs was invited to take part in communion services at Calder, near Glasgow. He was wonderfully assisted, and had "a strange gale through all the sermon". His hearers were affected in an unusual degree: glory seemed to fill the house. A Christian man that had been at the table, and was obliged to come out of the church, pressing to get in again, could not succeed for some time, but stood without the door, wrapt up in the thoughts of that glory that was in the house, for nearly half-an-hour, and could think of nothing else.[2]

(3) Thanksgiving is that department of prayer which makes grateful recognition of the fact that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights". Although not enjoined explicitly in the Lord's Prayer

[1] John Livingstone's Diary, 14 December, 1634 (Wodrow Society).
[2] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 97.

it is present there as an atmosphere, and indeed, as such, should permeate all worship. The very petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," recognizes God as the All-Giver to whom man must look for blessing, and to whom, by all the worthy instincts of his nature, he is taught to return thanksgiving. Not merely like the flowers, unconsciously exhaling the incense-sweetness of a fragrant life; but, because man is more than a flower, he is enjoined by Scripture as well as prompted by intelligence to give glad utterance to his gratitude.

¶ It is a selfish doctrine which altogether confounds thanksgiving and praise. The "Exhortation" distinguishes the two. To render thanks for the great benefits received at His hands: that is thanksgiving. To set forth His most worthy praise; to tell, that is, what He is in Himself: that is adoration.[1]

¶ Although, in devotion, we neither can nor ought to be always drawing the line with the precision of a dogmatic treatise, it is practically important to distinguish between adoration and thanksgiving. In adoration we contemplate, as in the Proper Preface for Trinity Sunday, the glory and the goodness of God in themselves. Adoration, "the speech not of aliens but of sons," is the homage due to Him from His created, redeemed, and sanctified children. In thanksgiving, His glory and His goodness are regarded as revealed in His mercies, whether general or particular, bestowed upon our race and ourselves. The two strains are blended in the opening sentence of the Magnificat:—

> "My soul doth magnify the Lord,
> And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour".[2]

(4) Adoration is more than admiration. The early Christian Church did not content herself with "admiring" Jesus Christ. She adored Him. She approached His glorious Person with that very tribute of prayer, of self-prostration, of self-surrender by which all serious Theists, whether Christian or non-Christian, are accustomed to express their felt relationship as creatures to the Almighty Creator. For as yet it was not supposed that a higher and truer knowledge of the Infinite God would lead man to abandon the sense and the expression of complete dependence upon Him and of unmeasured indebtedness to Him, which befits

[1] C. J. Vaughan, *Revelation*, 156. [2] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 215.

a reasonable creature whom God has made, and whom God owns and can dispose of, when such a creature is dealing with God. As yet it was not imagined that this bearing would or could be exchanged for the more easy demeanour of an equal, or of one deeming himself scarcely less than an equal, who is intelligently appreciating the existence of a remarkably wise and powerful Being, entitled by His activities to a very large share of speculative attention. The Church simply adored God; and she adored Jesus Christ, as believing Him to be God. Nor did she destroy the significance of this act by conceiving that admiration differs from adoration only in degree, that a sincere admiration is practically equivalent to adoration, that adoration after all is only admiration raised to the height of an enthusiasm.

¶ Contrasting the Christian belief in a God who can work miracles with the "scientific" belief in a God who is the slave of "law," Mr. Lecky remarks that the former "predisposes us most to prayer," the latter to "reverence and admiration". Here the antithesis between "reverence" and "prayer" seems to imply that the latter word is used in the narrow sense which embraces the whole compass of the soul's devotional activity, and, among other things, adoration. Still, if Mr. Lecky had meant to include under "reverence" anything higher than we yield to the highest forms of human greatness, he would scarcely have coupled it with "admiration".[1]

3. The element of adoration in worship has been frequently criticised. We offer to God, it is said, what we would not offer to a man. But we must look at prayer from the human rather than from the Divine side. Whether God needs such praise is one question, and whether man needs to offer it is quite another. There are moments of warmth and enthusiasm in which we do not hesitate to express to our friends our praise of them, moments when we cannot restrain ourselves, but have to give utterance to our feeling towards them; and this is not flattery, but only the natural outpouring of our love and appreciation. So it is in prayer. It is one of the ways by which man climbs upward; and when in his love and adoration he utters his praise to God, that praise is not meant to influence God; it influences the man

[1] H. P. Liddon, *The Divinity of our Lord*, 367.

himself; it helps to keep before him, to fix in his mind and heart, the object of his devotion.

¶ Why does God want so much to be praised? A good man does not at all want to be praised; a good man dislikes it if he is too much praised, especially to his face. Why does God want to be praised? Why is the whole of religion said to be praising God? Why, for instance, in the Ordination prayer is it said, "He [Christ] gathered together a great flock in all parts of the world to set forth the eternal praise of Thy holy Name"?—one of the most beautiful sentences in the Ordination Service.

I can remember when I was a young man that this was a real difficulty to me. I could not understand why it was. It seemed almost selfishness on the part of God to want so much praise. In order to answer that, I want you to call to mind a picture which seems to me one of the most inspired ever painted. You have probably seen it, or seen representations of it. It is called "The Triumph of Love". It is one of Watts' pictures, and it represents a slim and beautiful figure trampling upon apparently dead bodies, with outstretched hands and upturned face to God. I ask myself, what is the meaning of that picture? Here, clearly, is a figure in praise. Love has triumphed, and Love praises. Is God a selfish God who simply craves for congratulations? See what the painter-poet meant. What he pictured was this: pure love struggling down here against all its foes, with vice and drink and gambling and malice and hatred, all against it. Love finds the battle very hard, beset on all sides, almost trampled down, just as you see to-day some good man almost trampled down by the forces against him; or some man almost sneered out of his religion in the City office; or a boy laughed at for being firm, who almost gives up his religion altogether; or a reformer in London trying to get rid of drink, gambling, vice, profligacy, who goes down sometimes under the organized force against him. But Love is struggling like that always, and just when Love is almost conquered, Love finds a power come down from Heaven and enter into him, finds new strength put into him, finds hope in his heart, finds his faith burning again, finds a strength not his own as he grapples with those enemies against which he fights, and at last, to his intense relief and to his glorious triumph, he conquers in a strength which is not his own. These foes of the human race have gone under his feet, and he knows that something is tingling in his veins which is not his own: a will not his own has grasped his, a heart not his own has warmed his; he hears in his ears a voice not his own, and he is all triumph, and he looks up and he praises.

Is that selfishness on the part of God? Why, God has been in the thick of the battle; God came down on the Cross, and bore the worst for love—God was the Love who was slain. It is, then, for our sake we have to praise, and not for God's sake. God wants His child to love Him; He wants His child's response as any father does, but it is for our sake that He wants us to praise.[1]

¶ I read lately in an atheistic tract a sentence to this effect: "Why should the omnipotent God be so weak as to be flattered by the praise of His creatures?" He is not flattered; He is gratified. He is unconscious of any benefit to Himself; but He sees a symptom of development in His children. He feels that His solitude is broken, that kindred spirits have arisen to share His nature. What a man praises either in God or his brother is an indication of the height which he has himself attained. He may be far behind in life. But his praise is the measure of him. It predicts his coming glory. It tells what he will be to-morrow. It is the primrose of his year. The cold may be still around him; his environment may be yet barren and bare. But the primrose—the putting forth of his admiration—shows that summer is on the way, and that ere long the land will be laden with fruits and flowers. That is why the heart of the heavenly Father rejoices in the creature's praise. It is a sign that His child is growing—growing into sympathy with a Father's mind, growing into fellowship with a Father's heart. God's joy in praise is a paternal joy.[2]

¶ It is interesting to notice that even in Comte's religion of humanity prayer had an important place. Every day had its saint, and the prayer consisted in the repetition of the virtues of the saint and the desire that they might be fulfilled in the life of the worshipper. There was no response from the saint who was thus worshipped, but there was believed to be an inspiring effect upon the worshipper.[3]

¶ Dr. A. J. Gordon describes the impression made upon his mind by intercourse with Joseph Rabinowitz, whom Dr. Delitzsch considered the most remarkable Jewish convert since Saul of Tarsus: "We shall not soon forget the radiance that would come into his face as he expounded the Messianic psalms at our morning or evening worship, and how, as here and there he caught a glimpse of the suffering or glorified Christ, he would suddenly

[1] A. F. Winnington Ingram, *The Love of the Trinity*, 319.

[2] G. Matheson, *Rests by the River*, 324.

[3] C. C. Everett, *Theism and the Christian Faith*, 462.

lift his hands and his eyes to heaven in a burst of adoration, exclaiming with Thomas, after he had seen the nail-prints, 'My Lord, and my God!'"[1]

4. Adoration is real prayer; if we say—

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity!

or if we say—

O Jesus, King most wonderful,
Thou Conqueror renowned,
Thou Sweetness most ineffable,
In whom all joys are found,

this is real prayer, although we ask for nothing. It is real prayer although, if we were to start to analyze all the expressions used, we might find ourselves in the very thick of intellectual perplexity. It is real prayer, because, if we use those words with sincerity and in reverence and soul-sensitiveness to God, we cannot fail to experience such pure emotions and such Godward aspirations as serve to establish and develop in us that spiritual attitude towards God through which, though it may be only in terms of love and not in terms of understanding, we realize the relation between our soul and Him. In such adoration we bring our soul into the ineffable light of God's presence; we do not seek actively to understand Him, but passively we let our soul lie in His sight; in quiet and lowly ways we anticipate that ecstasy of which Faber sang—

Father of Jesus, love's Reward!
What rapture will it be,
Prostrate before Thy Throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee!

We come into the Divine presence and let the light shine on us, and Divine influences play upon us; we rest in the Lord. That is real prayer; it fulfils the prime function of prayer; it brings us closer to God; it opens avenues to the inflowing of His life; and such prayer is answered.

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 98.

¶ Just as the free playing of the sunlight upon a garment cleanses it from lurking impurity; just as the summer sun kisses the apples in the orchard until they blush for very gladness; so is our adoration of Him who is the eternal Light of light answered in the purity, the beauty, and the joy which the sense of His over-shadowing presence and the suffering of His all-embracing influence give to our lives.[1]

¶ This is the prerogative of song, that it not only furnishes a medium for the expression of feeling, but awakens the very feeling of which it is the expression; and the poet, for the moment, is the master of the memory, the hope, the confidence, and the imagination of multitudes, bearing them away upon the tide of his verse to regions of enterprise, of courage, and of faith, which they could never have reached by the lonely prompting of their own thoughts. This is pre-eminently the power of sacred song. When we sing together the strains of a divine poet, whose heart has been touched by the fire that kindles the muse of seraphs, we are in immediate communion with the Spirit of Jesus: and the psalm, the hymn, or the spiritual song does not end in a momentary delectation of the fancy; it quickens our faith to hear others chant the assurance of theirs; it fortifies our courage to assume the victory of others; it permanently raises the tone of our life to dwell in thought even for a few moments with the societies and choirs of the upper sanctuary.

Triumphant host! they never cease
To laud and magnify
The Triune God of holiness,
Whose glory fills the sky;

Whose glory to this earth extends,
When God Himself imparts,
And the whole Trinity descends
Into our faithful hearts.[2]

5. Adoration is the expression of two emotions—confidence and fear. Separately these emotions are incomplete; they seem even contradictory. They are blended in perfect harmony in God as seen in the face of Jesus Christ, and in that adoration which recognizes the love that gave and the holiness that required the Son to death.

[1] E. W. Lewis, *Some Views of Modern Theology*, 41.
[2] E. E. Jenkins, *Life and Christ*, 292.

¶ I read, the other day, two Boston sonnets, entitled "Trust," and making of the crystalline window of one of the deepest human experiences an opening through which to look into the sky behind the sky:—

I know that thou art true, and strong and pure;
My forehead on thy palm I fall asleep,
My sentinels with thee no vigils keep,
Though elsewhere never without watch secure.
How restful is thy palm! I life endure,
These stranger souls whose veils I shyly sweep,
These doubts what secrets hide within the deep
Because aglow within the vast obscure.
Thy hand is whitest light! My Peace art thou,
My firm green isle within a troubled sea;
And lying here and looking upward now
I ask, if thou art this, what God must be—
If thus I rest within thy goodness, how
In goodness of the Infinite degree?

But there are lightnings wherever there is love, for character cannot have one side without having two sides—we cannot love good and not abhor evil; and so the second sonnet, equally true to trust, contrasts with the first:—

This crystal soul of thine, were it outspread,
Until the drop should fill the universe,
How in it might the angels' wings immerse,
And wake and sleep the living and the dead;
Bereaved eyes bathe; rest Doubt its tossing head;
Swim the vast worlds; dissolve Guilt's icy curse;
And sightless, if but loyal, each disperse
Fear by full trust, and, by devotion, dread.
And yet these perfect eyes in which mine sleep
Would not be sweet were not their lightning deep;
In softest skies the swiftest firebolts dwell;
Thine eyes mix dew and flame, and both are well.
If thus I fear this soul, O God, how Thee,
Both Love's and Lightning's full Infinity?[1]

[1] Joseph Cook, *Monday Lectures*, i. 58.

IV.

Confession.

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CONFESSION.

THE Bible gives an important place to confession of sin. Its message may be summed up in the words, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness". The Old Testament teaches that confession of sins is the necessary expression of true repentance, and is also the condition of the Divine forgiveness. And though confession of sins is only once expressly named in the Gospels, the New Testament takes full account of its importance. "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel." His last recorded words declare that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached" in His name unto all nations, and neither repentance nor remission of sins is considered possible from the Biblical standpoint until sins are confessed. "Father, I have sinned," said the prodigal when he came to himself. The publican who went down to his house justified had smitten upon his heart, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner," whilst the Pharisee whom our Lord pilloried made no confession of sin. If we desire to claim the promises of pardon for our sins, we must fulfil the condition by confessing our sins. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." "The Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, and that we should not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God our Heavenly Father, but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart, to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same by His infinite goodness and mercy."

1. In confession the worshipper's keenest consciousness is of his weakness, his guilt, his unworthiness. "O my God, my sins are many, great are my transgressions," is the confession of the

sinner in one of the penitential psalms of the Babylonians. "I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me," says a Hebrew psalmist. Yet always, mingled with the consciousness of his own sin, the penitent has the vivid consciousness of God, else this were no religious experience, and the consciousness of intercourse with God, else it were no prayer. In penitential prayer I am conscious of my weakness, my failure, my sin, not as a merely individual experience, and not simply as a contravention of human law, an attack on society, a wrong to my fellow-men, but in its relation to God. I am conscious of my weakness as contrasted with His strength, of my sin as opposition to His will. And I cry, in the acuteness of this personal contact of sinning soul with Divine Self, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned".

2. The formal confessions of later times in the Bible always acknowledge the justice of God. "Thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve," and "Thou art just in all that is come upon us". So the worshippers can do nothing but throw themselves upon the marvellous mercy of God. "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses." He is ready to blot out as a thick cloud their transgressions. He is a God that pardons iniquity. True, it is this persistent goodness of God—what Ezra twice calls His "manifold mercies"—that makes their wickedness so heinous. They had sinned against a light that had shone as the noon-day. But as that mercy was the deepest thing in the Divine nature, it could always be depended upon by those who turned to it in sincerity and truth. So they confess in hope. "For we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies;" and a passionate earnestness rings through the words with which this prayer concludes: "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God".

I.

General and Particular.

Confession is of two kinds: general and particular. That which we use in public is of necessity general. And this not only

because it is used by all, which is probably the meaning of the expression in the Rubric, "A general Confession, to be said of the whole Congregation after the Minister, all kneeling"; but also because, being used by all, it cannot enter into the particulars of individual sin; it can only express, in strong terms, and in broad lines of description, that which is the true character of all hearts and lives, when the light of God's presence and of God's holiness is thrown upon them. "We have erred and strayed. . . . We have followed our own devices. . . . We have offended. . . . We have left undone the right. . . . We have done the wrong. . . . There is no health in us." This is an instance of general confession. Now confession of this kind is not to be despised. Though general, it is not necessarily vague. No doubt it may be made vague by any of us. But where there is a serious desire to take a true view of our condition as fallen creatures, and as actually sinful and sinning creatures, in the sight of a pure and holy God, there is great force, and great benefit in this outpouring of a general self-lamentation in the all-hearing ear; there is something deeply real in this plunging of the universal being into the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, this gathering of the whole experience, as the course of life has brought it to us, into one sweeping act of self-condemnation and self-renunciation, constraining us to throw ourselves absolutely and without exception upon the mere mercy and compassion of a pitying, a long-suffering, and a redeeming God. Let no man despise it.

But then this general confession must be made real, and kept real, by that which is minute, individual, particular. Even in the congregation, under the veil of this general language, there is time and place for something with which no stranger can intermeddle. These hearts which are unfolding themselves at the mercy-seat of God do not lose their individuality by the presence of other hearts around them. Even the general confession is the sum of a thousand particular confessions, and then rises with full meaning into the ear of God only when it is prompted by the personal experiences of a multitude of persons, each of whom is grieved and wearied by the heavy burden of his own separate sins.

¶ Multitudes of devout souls have found the noble language of the "General Confession" to be a means of grace. There is

something peculiarly solemn in a united confession of sin by a large assembly. Differences of social position and of personal attainment seem to be lost sight of when peer and peasant, saint and sinner, kneel side by side and repeat together, "We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep". The spirits of good people are touched to some of their finer issues when "the Lord, gracious and full of compassion," bends over the congregation of penitents. But a "General Confession" cannot possibly satisfy the requirements of a spiritual religion. A sad experience declares that such a united act may cover up much unreality. The acknowledgment that we are "miserable offenders" is made with mental reservations. Nobody else is expected to believe it about the man who says it. The tempter whispers into the ear of the worshipper that it is the other members of the congregation who are meant chiefly by the offenders against God's holy laws. We are well-nigh guilty of a presumptuous idea that the confession is a vicarious act on our part, in which we encourage our neighbours to acknowledge their faults by assuming for the moment that we may be faulty too; we intend to put aside the assumption directly we rise from our knees, and we nourish the pious hope that our neighbours will hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life. The presence of other people diffuses responsibility. The cloud of transgression thins out in order to cover everybody, and easy souls get the impression that their heads reach above the cloud altogether, into the sunshine. Therefore a general confession must be complemented by a particular confession, in which each individual soul shall come face to face with God.[1]

¶ The easiest place for a criminal to lose himself in is a crowd. The fugitive from justice rarely flees to the solitude of the countryside, but buries himself in the heart of some great city. It is easier to escape detection in the midst of his fellow-men than in the lonely recesses of the forest or the hills. Many a criminal has been lost to justice in the teeming populace of the metropolis. Do we not carry something of this thought, something of the hope that our individual guilt will remain undetected in the crowd, into our dealings with God? Do we not sometimes lose the sense of our personal responsibility when we join in our general confession, "*We* have erred and strayed like lost sheep. . . . There is no health in *us*"? It is easy, for a time at least, to bury ourselves in such a crowd as that. But oh! if we are ever to taste the sweetness of Divine pardon, if we are ever to

[1] J. E. Roberts, *Private Prayers and Devotions*, 54.

thrill with joy at the gracious assurance, "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven," we must come out of that crowd and cast ourselves individually in the dust before Him. "I will confess mine iniquity unto the Lord," cried David, in all the terrible isolation of his conscious guilt; and then he found the blessing—"Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin". "God be merciful to me the sinner," sobbed the poor publican, as he beat upon his breast in the agony of his personal grief; and when he came to that point of self-condemnation, he too found the blessing—"He went down to his house justified". The prodigal, burying his face in his father's bosom, cried, "Father, I have sinned," and then too the blessing was his—"This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found".[1]

¶ There were differences among the doctors of the Talmud as to the propriety of manifold and detailed confessions. Thus Rabbi Judah ben Baba held that it was not enough to make a general confession, and he cited the example of Moses who prayed, "Alas, this people have sinned a great sin—they have made themselves a golden calf". Another thought that the essence of all was contained in the words, "Verily we have sinned". Another, again, found fault with the enumeration of our sins at all. "To my thinking it is a sign of effrontery in a person to detail all his offences" (*Sotah*, 7*b*). But in the long run the objection was not held to be valid, and rightly so, for, after all, the effrontery lies in the committing of sins not in admitting them. Still the older forms of the Alphabetical Confession were much simpler and more succinct than ours. But they included a confession of "Sins done under compulsion, or of our own free will; in error or with deliberation; in secret or in public; consciously or unconsciously"—categories comprehensive enough.[2]

¶ In some of the older devotional books of the synagogue there is found, at points where a general confession has been made, a blank space introduced by "and in particular," "We have sinned in this and that respect, and especially"—in what, each has then to supply.[3]

Stand still, my soul, in the silent dark,
I would question thee,
Alone in the shadow drear and stark,
With God and me!

[1] G. A. Sowter, *Trial and Triumph*, 40.
[2] S. Singer, *Sermons and Memoir*, 72. [3] *Ibid.* 73.

What! silent all! art sad of cheer?
  Art fearful now?
When God seemed far and men were near,
  How brave wert thou!

Aha! thou tremblest!—Well I see
  Thou'rt craven grown.
Is it so hard with God and me
  To stand alone?

Ah! soul of mine, so brave and wise
  In the life-storm loud,
Fronting so calmly all human eyes
  In the sunlit crowd!

Now standing apart with God and me,
  Thou art weakness all,
Gazing vainly after the things to be
  Through Death's dread wall.

1. One reason why a general confession cannot suffice is that it is too "general". It does not particularize our sins enough. So many needle-points are packed together that there is a smooth surface rather than a series of pricks. The sword does not get in through the joints of our harness. Something much more searching is needed than a general confession if we are to be cleansed from all our sins and to serve God with a quiet mind. We are tied and bound with the chain of our sins; and if the pitifulness of God's great mercy is to loose us, the links in the chain must be isolated and snapped one by one. In our private prayers we may offer that marvellous petition, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting". The candle of the Lord can search a soul best when it is in its inner chamber and the door is shut. Then sins are discovered whose existence was not suspected in the general assembly.

¶ I was crossing a golf course one day, and was amazed to see one of the greens covered with large worms. Some worm casts had been noticed on that green before, and there was a vague idea that a roller needed to be used. But now a particular liquid had been poured over the green, which compelled all the worms to wriggle out into the light. Then it was obvious to all that

the green was swarming with them just below the surface. In our private prayers we allow the Divine Gardener to pour over our lives the liquid that discovers secret sins. Very often the result is amazing. Instead of being content with a General Absolution following a General Confession, like a garden roller over the casts, we are on our knees before God crying "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me." [1]

¶ A wise old writer says, "A child of God will confess sin in particular; an unsound Christian will confess sin by wholesale; he will acknowledge he is a sinner in general; whereas David doth, as it were, point with his finger to the sore: 'I have done this evil' (Ps. li. 4); he doth not say, 'I have done evil,' but 'this evil'. He points to his blood-guiltiness." [2]

2. But not only must there be self-examination, so that we may discover our sins, there must also be confession of them. Some honest self-examination there must be if our confession is to nurture our Christian life. But how can God forgive our sins unless we confess them? The confession of sin is an essential part of all true repentance. The prodigal must not only experience in the "far country" the sense of grief and shame at his folly, and find his way back in sorrow to the father's house, but the pent-up emotions of his heart must find an outlet in full and frank confession before he could taste the sweetness of forgiving love. "Father," he cried, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And then it was that his rags were removed and the best robe in the father's house was put on him instead; then it was that the ring was slipped upon his finger as an emblem of love that both forgave and forgot, and he was taken back to the father's heart and home again.

This confession must be frank and full and unreserved. No extenuating plea must mar its utterance. No excuse for sin must mingle with the breath of sin's confession. Nothing must be palliated or softened down. We are prone to make excuses

[1] J. E. Roberts, *Private Prayers and Devotions*, 54.
[2] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 102.

for our sins even on our knees. All those pleas which we are so familiar with and which we utter with such facility, either to shift the guilt to another or to excuse it in ourselves—all those pleas of ignorance, or compulsion, or strong and sudden temptation, or natural infirmity, or good intention—all those "buts" which fall so easily from our lips in our dealings with God only choke the channel of Divine forgiveness and rob us of the blessing we stand in need of. It is only "if we confess our sins," not if we excuse and mitigate our sins, that He is faithful and just to pardon them every one.

Our confession must also be humble and contrite. No shred of self-complacency lingered in the prodigal's heart as he turned his steps homeward. The clothing of his spirit was as rent and torn as the tatters which hung about his body. He was utterly humbled, sincerely contrite, ready to take the lowest place in the old home now. "Make me as one of thy hired servants." Lower even than a slave stood the hireling, the mere day labourer; no legal rights in the family safeguarded and ameliorated his position, such as mitigated the position of the slave. Yet such a status as that was all the prodigal could dare to hope for in the depths of his self-reproach and self-abasement. He must have been utterly heart-broken to have come down to that.

¶ We shall do well to take heed to the urgent pleas of Thomas à Kempis: "Examine diligently thy conscience, and to the utmost of thy power purify and make it clear, with true contrition and humble confession; so as there may be nothing in thee that may weigh heavy upon thee, or that may breed in thee remorse of conscience, or hinder thy free access to the throne of grace. Think with displeasure of all thy sins in general, and more particularly bewail and lament thy daily transgressions. And if thou hast time, confess unto God, in the secret of thine heart, all the wretchedness of thy disordered passions."

II.

Hopeful.

It is very necessary that in self-examination we should search with God the inmost secrets of the heart and bow in uttermost humility before Him. Yet it sometimes happens that, in the ap-

prehension of thinking too favourably of ourselves, we fall into the opposite extreme. We disclaim all good, every better quality. Then, in the midst of this self-abasement, a voice within whispers, "How very humble thou art!" and thus pride strikes its roots, though quite secretly, in the soul. God is the God of truth. Therefore we cannot please Him by making ourselves worse than we are. We are to pass neither too gentle nor too harsh a judgment on ourselves, but one in harmony with truth. If in our own thoughts we disparage ourselves beneath our real worth, this inward untruth is again rebuked by the same voice that whispered in our ear of our marked humility. No doubt we are always to feel ourselves to be poor sinners; but if we are true Christians, we cannot forget that we are God's children. No doubt we should sorrow that the power of sin is not yet utterly broken in us, that we are compelled, therefore, to stand perpetually on our guard; but it were ingratitude not to rejoice in God's grace, which, provided our faith is a living one, we know not merely as pardoning mercy, but also as the living energy by which our inner nature is being more and more renewed. We are by no means so good that, in order to remain humble, we are absolutely compelled to regard ourselves as worse than we are. Even if we were so advanced, is not all self-complacency dashed to the ground by the single thought: "What had become of thee if thou hadst had no Saviour?"

¶ There are two dangers, quite opposite in character, which are liable to confront us as we engage in the practice of Confession. On the one hand, there is the danger to regard confession as a mere matter of routine, and, in consequence, to think lightly of sin; on the other hand, we may be tempted to indulge in morbid self-examination. In both cases the great truth has been forgotten that confession is of no use unless we are ready to forsake the sins we own. If we are content to go on day after day, as many do, acknowledging the same sins without breaking loose from them, conscience will be dulled, and we shall become too familiar with sin to see its hatefulness in God's sight. If on the other hand we are forever bemoaning our besetting sins and allowing ourselves daily to sink lower under the burden of them, we are surely dishonouring God, who is bidding us rise up from our faces to put away the accursed thing from amongst us. If, however, we forsake the sin which we confess, and daily prove the power of God to deliver us, and believe His word, "Sin shall not

have dominion over you," confession may be the path to untold blessing.[1]

¶ It is of the first importance that in all the exercises of the secret chamber we should yield ourselves to the blessed influences of the Comforter, by whom alone we are enabled to pray with acceptance. An important caution in regard to this has been noted by Ralph Erskine. In his diary he writes, under the date, Jan. 23, 1733: "This morning . . . I was quickened in prayer, and strengthened to hope in the Lord. At the beginning of my prayer I discerned a lively frame in asserting a God in Christ to be the fountain of my life, the strength of my life, the joy of my life; and that I had no life that deserved that name, unless He Himself were my life. But here, checking myself with reflections upon my own sinfulness, vileness, and corruption, I began to acknowledge my wickedness; but for the time the sweetness of frame failed me, and wore off. Whence, I think, I may gather this lesson, that no sweet influence of the Spirit ought to be checked upon pretence of getting a frame better founded upon humiliation; otherwise the Lord may be provoked to withdraw." When Thomas Boston found himself in danger of giving way to vain-glory, he took a look at his black feet. We may well do the same, but never so as to lose our assurance of sonship, or our sense of the preciousness of Christ. As Rutherford reminds us, "There is no law-music in heaven: there all their song is, 'Worthy is the Lamb'." And the blood of ransom has atoned for *all sin*.[2]

III.

Heartfelt.

There must be reality in our confessions. In more ways than one we seek to escape this demand, for a true heartfelt confession is by no means easy to make.

1. We probably never pray, without making confession of sin. Do we mean it? There is a natural reluctance to that detection which all real confession presupposes. It is this reluctance which, in the last analysis, we find keeps men back from Christ. "This is the judgment," says St. John, "that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil. For every one that doeth ill hateth

[1] Charles F. Harford-Battersby, *Daily: A Help to Private Prayer*, 21.
[2] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 105.

the light, and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reproved." Now this natural reluctance is not for ever overcome by the initial experience of conviction and confession. It remains with us, and may even acquire fresh strength. This reluctance may easily be stronger at a later stage of a Christian's life than it was when he first acknowledged to God his transgressions. First confessions are not always the hardest to make. If old sins treacherously recur; if we find that we have outgrown some sins by the mere lapse of time, only to develop new sins, less passionate, perhaps, but likely to be more persistent; if on a review we find that we have gone backward rather than forward, who of us would not feel humiliated? Who of us does not shrink from acknowledging such things even to himself? Who of us is not aware of a reluctance to come to the light, an unwillingness to admit what we suspect, and what an unflinching scrutiny would put beyond suspicion? Who of us that attends to his inner life does not know how the very pang of conscience which attends some sin into which he may have been surprised starts into action an exculpatory train of thought, by which the sin is relieved of its grievousness? An oyster will so cover an irritating grain of sand that it becomes a pearl. And a tolerated sin may be so enveloped in palliations, that, if we do not admire it, we are at least no longer pained by it.

¶ A somewhat amazing fact in the strange and contradictory character of Samuel Pepys is the constant element of subtlety which blends with so much frankness. He wants to do wrong in many different ways, but he wants still more to do it with propriety, and to have some sort of plausible excuse which will explain it in a respectable light. Nor is it only other people whom he is bent on deceiving. Were that all, we should have a very simple type of hypocritical scoundrel, which would be as different as possible from the extraordinary Pepys. There is a sense of propriety in him, and a conscience of obeying the letter of the law and keeping up appearances even in his own eyes. If he can persuade himself that he has done that, all things are open to him. He will receive a bribe, but it must be given in such a way that he can satisfy his conscience with ingenious words. The envelope has coins in it, but then he opens it behind his back and the coins fall out upon the floor. He has only picked them up when he found them there, and can defy the world to accuse him of having received any coins in the envelope

It is a curious question what idea of God can be entertained by a man who plays tricks with himself in this fashion. Of Pepys certainly it cannot be said that God "is not in all his thoughts," for the name and the remembrance are constantly recurring. Yet God seems to occupy a quite hermetically sealed compartment of the universe; for His servant in London shamelessly goes on with the game he is playing, and appears to take a pride in the very conscience he systematically hoodwinks.[1]

2. Again, in many instances, self-accusation is not the outcome of a genuine self-dissatisfaction. It is often but a form of morbid self-indulgence. "There is a luxury in self-dispraise," says one of our poets. There are people who take a strange pleasure in disparaging themselves, in charging themselves with all kinds of wickedness, railing against themselves as miserable sinners; but all their lamentations about their weak and sinful lives are not the least guarantee of a change, or as much as an effort, for the better. There is even a suspicion of hypocrisy, of posing, in many confessions of this insincere kind. Some of the Italian writers, both Jews and others, accuse themselves of sins they never committed, because those sins were regarded as fashionable marks of the man-about-town. The law does not readily condemn a man on his own unsupported confession. Corroborative evidence is demanded before a conviction is entered. Men play with the founts of their spiritual being.

¶ Vanity, unequivocal vanity, sometimes finds vent in self-depreciation. One mode of this is when we affectedly cry ourselves down with a hope—more or less concealed even from ourselves—that others will protest and set us up again. Another mode is when we cry ourselves down as to particular faculties of a secondary order, in order by implication to set up some faculty of higher rank.[2]

IV.

Desire for Holiness.

The true prayer for forgiveness implies the germ of a real desire to be delivered not only from the penalty of sin, but from sin in itself, from its disorder, its bondage, its pollution. Apart

[1] J. Kelman, *Among Famous Books*, 187.

[2] *Letters on Church and Religion of W. E. Gladstone*, ii. 161.

from that desire, the prayer could receive no answer such as would be consistent with the holy love of God, because he who offered it would not be in a moral condition which is forgivable. It is a desire due to the action of the Holy Spirit. He convicts not only of sin by the revelation of its nature and effects; He convicts also of righteousness by the revelation of the character of the Man Christ Jesus, and of our supernatural capacities through incorporation with His new and sacred humanity.

Here is the imperishable power of the *Miserere* lifted by its inspiration beyond the circumstances which were the immediate cause of its composition. There is in that psalm not only the cry for pardon, but the desire for holiness; there is not only the vision of mercy, but the vision of restoration; there is not only the hope of reunion with the outward worship of the Church, but in that worship the penitential joy of the inward offering of the broken and contrite heart. In the Christian use of the same psalm we learn that in the act of Divine forgiveness there is no element of moral laxity. The pardon meets the desire for holiness, however rudimentary that desire may be, and it makes actual holiness a possibility. In his confession and in his prayer, the penitent desires an absolution which shall be not only an authoritative message of peace but also a gracious means of deliverance from sin's power.

¶ Our prayer must therefore be, "Lord, take my heart and cleanse it, for I cannot cleanse it myself; keep it Thyself, for I cannot keep it for Thee". And He will answer the prayer. He will bring these poor sinful hearts of ours into such close fellowship with Himself that His holy nature will be transfused into ours; moment by moment we shall become larger sharers in His victory and His peace: and the hearts in which He dwells will become living temples, full of "thanksgiving and the voice of melody".[1]

V.

Endeavour After New Obedience.

And as confession is made in sincerity and in truth, the conception of the life which we ought to live grows clearer. As satisfaction with self departs in the prayer for forgiveness, and

[1] G. H. Knight, *In the Secret of His Presence*, 30.

we rejoice to realize that God is once more occupying the throne of the heart, so the ideal of the life of those who would "ascend into the hill of the Lord," and "stand in his holy place," or be hidden "in the covert of his presence," is ever rising. We may go through a long list of the questions for self-examination provided in many devotional manuals, and few of these, perhaps, may touch us. But then there are the things left undone which we ought to have done, as well as the things done which we ought not to have done. There are failures, neglects, omissions, in regard to God, our neighbour, and ourselves which constitute a "burden that is intolerable". And there is also the standard which we ought in our consciences to recognize of the life and character and conduct of the children of the Father, as it is portrayed by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount and in many a parable, or by St. Paul in the letter to Ephesus, or by St. John in his First Epistle, developing the sense of the new commandment given at the institution of the Sacrament of unity by his Master, "That ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another," when He made that unity in love the evidence of discipleship.

¶ I do not think that we are called upon to confess our sins to men, except in certain cases, or when we have individually wronged them; but we are called upon to acknowledge them before God—"O Lord, against thee, thee only, have I sinned". Nor should we tease ourselves about the past, which cannot be undone. But we should set before ourselves, and fix indelibly in our minds, that these things were wrong, offences against the laws of God, and some of them perhaps disgraceful in the opinion of men. One use of prayer is to maintain in us a higher standard, and prevent our principles insensibly sinking to our practice, or to the practice of the world around us. When a man listens to the voice of the tempter within him, he is inclined to do as others do, not to resist when the temptation seems great. But when he looks into the law of God and hears the words of Christ, his natural sense of right and wrong is restored to him, and he becomes elevated, purified, sanctified.[1]

¶ In the secret of His presence we can lay bare to Him, without fear, the inmost secrets of the soul. This is what we cannot do even to the dearest friend on earth. It is what we sometimes

[1] B. Jowett, *Sermons on Faith and Doctrine*, 259.

dare not do. Our lips are sealed for very shame. But freely and unrestrainedly we can confide our most secret shames and sadnesses to the ear of our listening Lord. It is this that makes the prayer-chamber a place of such infinite *relief* to an overburdened spirit.[1]

[1] G. H. Knight, *In the Secret of His Presence*, 67.

V.

PETITION.

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PETITION.

1. THE Sermon on the Mount provides us with the precept, the reasonableness, the character, and the form of prayer.

It gives us the precept: "Ask, and it shall be given you". It shows us the reasonableness—for "What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" It discovers the character of prayer when it bids us use no vain repetitions, remembering that God knows our needs before we ask Him. And it provides the mould or type or form of prayer in the words of the Lord's Prayer.

(1) First, we have the precept. Prayer is a duty of the Christian life enjoined upon us all by our Saviour Himself, and therefore to neglect prayer is to break one of the commandments of God. It is well to feel the pressure of this command and to experience once again the freshness of its force. And the impression is deepened when we see how our Saviour supported His teaching by His example. Nor was it merely for the sake of example that He prayed; prayer was in some mysterious sense a necessary part of His ministerial life. In the moment of His baptism He prayed, and a voice was heard from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased". He prayed on the mount, and His face and whole form was transfigured; to St. Peter He said, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not"; in the garden of the agony He prayed for Himself, and on the cross He prayed for His enemies: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". Sometimes, too, He would pray all night in view of some coming event, as before His choice of the Twelve; and He enjoins upon all of us the double attitude of watchfulness and prayer as a necessary prescription for the snares and temptations of the world.

(2) Now prayer, as thus set before us, is no mere vague and general exercise, but individuals as well as communities are mentioned by name, and many and various requests are made both for self and for others. Prayer is therefore a reasonable exercise as well as an attitude of the soul; for if asking be the primary meaning of prayer, is not our everyday life full of it? Power comes from God and is variously distributed to men; and, although much of it is ours without our asking, the general rule is that we must ask for things if we would have them; they are not ours merely because they lie about us; we have to bestir ourselves and let our requests be made known to others in order that we may obtain blessings for ourselves.

(3) Next, there is the character of prayer. Our Lord reminds us that if prayer to God is but an extension of that principle which leads us to beg favours from our fellow-men, nevertheless we have to remember that He is in heaven, whereas we are on earth, that He knows our necessities before we ask, and that we must therefore avoid vain repetitions, inasmuch as we shall not be heard for our much speaking. It is true that prayer is not merely asking, but also any form of communion with God; nevertheless its primary meaning is petition, and we do not know how to pray until we have learnt how to ask.

(4) Lastly, the Sermon on the Mount gives us the right type or form of prayer. For the Lord's Prayer is not merely one among a number of prayers, but the representative prayer of all; and as in matters of taste a standard or idea of the subject must first be set up in our minds, all our efforts being made as far as possible to conform to it, so is it also with prayer. Thus we ought to recognize in the "Our Father," over and beyond the special beauty and grandeur that attach to it as proceeding from our Saviour's own lips, a framework for all prayers whatsoever, or, to change the figure, the normal lines upon which all our prayers of whatever kind should be made to run. And, first, we are directed to a Person and a Place outside us: to our Father, and to Heaven, where He has His throne; suggesting to us how a picture in the mind at the outset will provide a help to our prayers throughout, while the address to God as "Our Father" proclaims the unity of the Church, and that exhibition of the family life which it is intended to portray. Next, we prepare the

way for our petitions by submitting beforehand to God's will. "Thy kingdom come"—may Thy rule gradually obtain everywhere, may the visible borders of Thy Church be extended, and every thought be brought at length into captivity to Christ; "that Christ may dwell in" our hearts "by faith," that "being rooted and grounded in love," we may "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height"; that is, that the will of God may be done on earth as it is done in heaven; not as though our prayer were put forth as an attempt to alter God's will, but on the contrary in direct obedience to His command, prayer itself being according to that will and part of the machinery for carrying it out.

¶ After this our Lord showed me concerning Prayer. I saw two conditions [needful] in them that pray, according to that I have felt in myself.

One is, they will not pray for anything that may be, but that thing that is God's will and His worship.

Another is, that they set them mightily and continually to beseech that thing that is His will and His worship.[1]

The dear God hears and pities all;
He knoweth all our wants;
And what we blindly ask of Him
His love withholds or grants.

And so I sometimes think our prayers
Might well be merged in one;
And nest and perch and hearth and church
Repeat "Thy will be done".[2]

2. The most obvious fact in the Lord's Prayer, when regarded as the norm of all prayer, is that God comes first. This prayer, with which we are so familiar as often to miss its significance, is a perpetual reminder of this, a perpetual safeguard against all unworthier conceptions of prayer. For it bids us think first of God and His holiness, of the spread of that holiness on earth, of His heavenly will being done. Only then follow personal petitions, and of these three are concerned with the spiritual obstacles which separate us from God: forgiveness of sin, rescue from temptation, deliverance from evil. One only is devoted to

[1] Lady Julian, *Comfortable Words for Christ's Lovers*, 96.
[2] Whittier, *The Common Question*.

our temporal welfare, and that in its simplest form, "Give us bread enough for to-day". And even this, of course, in the light of Christ's teaching, passes up into a spiritual significance, and leads our thoughts on to the meat which is to do God's will, and the bread that came down from heaven. Thus the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray, in the deepest sense of the word, for it shows us the true order and importance and proportion of the objects of prayer; and to live it out is to live in union with God.

Naturally we are disposed to reverse the order. Our own personal needs are so present and pressing that these are ever ready to come uppermost, and then they occupy us so much that the time which ought to be devoted to praise and thanksgiving is often wanting. The consequence of this is that faith is weakened, and prayer becomes so purely selfish that it loses its power both over ourselves and over God.

¶ Some good people never go outside the circle of self in their prayers. Yet the last place in the world where we should be selfish is when we are on our knees. A minister made a strange request of a parishioner—that for a month he should not offer a single word of prayer for himself, or for any of his family, nor bring any of his own affairs to God. "What then shall I pray for?" asked the friend. "Anything that is in your heart, only not once for yourself." When the good man came to his first season of prayer it seemed that he could find nothing to pray for. He would begin a familiar petition, but had to drop it, for it was something for himself. It was a serious month for him, but he learned his lesson. He found that he had been praying only for himself and his own household, and had not been taking the interests of any others to God. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray for others with ourselves. It is not, "Give me this day my daily bread," but "Give us our bread to-day," leaving out no other hungry one.[1]

¶ My brother, take heed to that for which thou prayest!—there lies the difference between the pious and the impious mind. It is not thy praying that makes thee good—not even thy sincerity in prayer. It is not thy sense of want that makes thee good—not even though expressed in abjectness. It is not thy feeling of dependence that makes thee good—not even thy feeling of dependence on Christ. It is the thing for which thou prayest, the thing for which thou hungerest, the thing for which thou

[1] J. R. Miller, *The Glory of the Commonplace*, 238.

dependest. Every man cries for his grapes of Eshcol; the difference is not in the cry, but in the grapes. It is possible for thee to ask from thy God three manner of things. Thou mayst ask thy neighbour's vineyard—that is bad. Thou mayst ask thine own riches—that is neither bad nor good; it is secular. Or thou mayst ask to be made unselfish—that is holy. It is not thy prayer that thy Father prizes; it is the direction of thy prayer. Dost thou deem thy child a hero because he asks thee for a holiday? Nay, though he sought it sorrowing and with tears. But if he asks thee to let him share his joy with a brother or sister, then thou art exceeding glad, then thou sayest, "Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee!" So with *thy* Father. He waits till thou criest for a crown—till thou prayest for His presence, longest for His light, sighest for His song, hungerest for His home, faintest for His footfall, callest for His company, tarriest for His tread, seekest for the sign of His coming. That will be thy Father's highest joy.[1]

I.

We have begun with God. We have considered the place of Adoration in the life of prayer; and we have considered the place of Confession. Now we turn to Petition, using that word in the sense of asking blessings for ourselves.

1. What may we ask God for? The answer is, "Everything". Nothing is too great and nothing too small to be remembered before God. No department of life should be excluded from the sphere of prayer. All our wants, all the wants of others, can be brought to the throne of grace. "In everything," writes St. Paul, "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." The Christian feels that there is no desire, plan, or enterprise, no act and no relationship of life, in which he is not dependent on Divine guidance, help, and blessing. He also feels that his relation of a child involves the confiding and unreserved love which pours out the whole heart before God. And if we are to give thanks in everything, and do all things to the glory of God, how is it possible that any step or duty or activity of life should be excluded from our petitions? As life wears on, brings out its trials and reveals its uncertainties, the religious soul is more and more thrown back on God as the only

[1] George Matheson, *Thoughts for Life's Journey*, 183.

One who knows us, who fully sympathizes with us, and who can really help us. Thus the soul comes to carry everything to God in the assurance that He hears us, sympathizes with us, and will help us as His love may prompt and His wisdom may direct. It would be an unreal and unwholesome refinement which would seek to displace this childlike openness and confidence by some colourless and general expression of trust. To pray about everything in submission to God's will would be both more human and more Christian than a scrupulous limitation of our prayers to what we might think permissible subjects of petition. God, without whom no sparrow falls, and who numbers the hairs of our heads, is not indifferent to anything which concerns His children, and they may talk with Him about everything with all the freedom of children in their Father's house.

¶ Our prayer has to do with everything that we experience. We can believe ourselves to be Christian, in the full sense of the term, only when everything that moves and stirs us is laid by us before God in prayer. When it thus extends to everything that our life actually embraces, it brings everything into connection with the relation in which we stand to God in Christ.[1]

¶ Once, when Dr. Moody Stuart happened to be in Huntly, Duncan Matheson took him to see some earnest Christian people. He visited, among others, an aged woman who was in her own way a "character". Before leaving, he prayed with her; and she, as her habit was, emphasized each petition with some ejaculatory comment or note of assent. Towards the close of his prayer he asked that God, according to His promise, would give her "all things". The old lady interjected, "All things, na, that *wad* be a lift". The mingling of comfort and dubiety which was revealed by the quaint interpolation is characteristic of the faith of very many of the children of God when they are brought face to face with some great promise addressed to believing prayer: "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive"; "Therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them"; "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you".[2]

2. It is especially to be remembered that nothing is too trivial to bring to God's notice. Things seemingly trivial have relation-

[1] J. Kaftan, *Die Christliche Lehre vom Gebet*, 4.
[2] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 114.

ships which elevate them into positions of supreme moment. And becoming of interest to us, they become of interest to Him who loves us. The smoothing of a pillow is in itself a trifle; but to the invalid it may mean refreshing repose, and the loving watcher will on that account perform this little act of kindness. And thus many movements of our lives are to all appearance as trifling as the smoothing of a pillow, but they may in reality have a far-reaching significance, and thus become important to God and to us. We may not therefore hesitate to lay before God, and to put into His hand, anything which concerns us. He invites this confidence. And we can conclude that we trust Him only when in this filial spirit we pour out our hearts before Him.

It has recently been asserted by a popular writer that all sensible men will soon see the absurdity "of airing their egotisms in God's presence through prayer, or of any such quiet personal intimacy". Jesus Christ, on the contrary, asserts that God is concerned with the welfare even of the lower creation: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father". Much more is He concerned with the details of human life: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered". If that be so, the "trivial round" of our life is not trivial in the eyes of God, who—albeit He "inhabiteth Eternity"—"yet humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth". Thus it would seem that the natural and reverent way of approaching God is not to settle beforehand the limit of His power, not to conclude that He can grant only this or that request, but to take Christ at His word, to tell God everything, to come as a little child to a father. He sees further than we do; and if in our blindness we ask for that which will do more harm than good, the Father will give, not what we think we want, but what we really want—give what we should have asked for, could we have seen as far as He sees.

> God nothing does, or suffers to be done
> But thou would'st do thyself, could'st thou but see
> The end of all events as well as He.

¶ Henry Clay Trumbull was a true prophet of God to our souls. He spoke forth the Infinite in the terms of our world,

and the Eternal in the forms of our human life. God was near him, almost visible. His faith in prayer was one noble expression of his realization of the present power of his Father. Some years ago on a ferry boat, I met a gentleman who knew him and I told him that when I had last seen Dr. Trumbull, a fortnight before, he had spoken of him. "Oh, yes!" said my friend, "he was a great Christian, so real, so intense. He was at my home years ago, and we were talking about prayer. 'Why, Trumbull,' I said, 'you don't mean to say that if you lost a lead pencil you would pray about it, and ask God to help you find it.' 'Of course I would; of course I would!' was his instant and excited reply." How easy it is to reproduce the very sound of the voice, to see the flash of the eye and the trembling gesture of the hand. Of course he would. Was not his faith a real thing? Like the Saviour he put his doctrine strongly by taking an extreme illustration to embody his principle, but the principle was fundamental. He would trust God in everything. He did trust Him. And the Father honoured the trust of His child.[1]

II.

1. There is one thought that must always be present when we ask what things we may pray for. All prayer must be in harmony with the will of God. This will be considered more fully when we come to the *conditions* of prayer. But it must be touched upon here and now. "Prayer is pleasing to God, that is, the prayer which is undertaken in the proper manner. He therefore, that desires to be heard should pray wisely, fervently, humbly, faithfully, perseveringly, confidently. Let him pray wisely, by which I mean, let him pray for those things which minister to the Divine glory and the salvation of his neighbours. God is all-powerful—therefore do not in your prayers prescribe how He shall act; He is all-wise—therefore do not determine when. Do not let your prayers break forth heedlessly, but let them follow the guidance of faith, remembering that faith has steady regard to the Divine word. Those things, therefore, which God promises absolutely in His word, those pray for absolutely. Those which He promises conditionally—for example, temporal things—those on the same principle pray for conditionally. Those things which He does not promise at all, those also

[1] R. E. Speer, *Men Who Were Found Faithful*, 168.

you will not pray for at all. God often grants in His anger what His goodness would deny. Therefore, follow Christ, who fully conforms His will to the will of God." So wrote the Lutheran Gerhard in his *Holy Meditations*. What he means is that prayer is a form of intelligent correspondence with the revealed will of God. This is the thought we are to have continually in mind when we attempt to answer the often repeated question—What ought we to pray for?

Our prayers must be sincere; they must always be the expression of our real mind and heart. Whatever really moves and stirs a Christian, he should also bring before God's throne in prayer. What is of importance is not whether it is great or small, but only the relation in which it stands to our spiritual life. God will be entreated for earthly gifts and blessings. It is true, as Luther says, that He gives them to us and to all men, without our praying for them. Our Father in heaven knows what we need. But without prayer we do not receive them in the right manner. In regard to such things there are only two courses open to men: either prayer or over-anxiety and pride; and our Lord's injunction is, that we should choose the former and leave the latter to the children of the world. But in praying for earthly things, we must never forget the subordination of such prayer to the prayer for the attainment of our highest aim, our eternal destiny, or that all our earthly circumstances are for the purpose of making us fit for the Kingdom of God. We pray, it may be, for the removal of obstructions that threaten us in our existence, in our calling; but, if we pray aright, there grows up out of this prayer the other prayer that such obstructions may not hinder us in the attainment of our highest aim; and, sure of being heard in this, we conclude our prayer by leaving the matter confidently in God's hand. So also with all truly Christian prayer for earthly blessings. With such prayer the answer is immediately and directly connected; it is realized in the perfect trust that all things work together for good to them that love God. We do not have an absolute promise that God will hear our petitions for earthly things in an external manner. But we have the promise that He so deals with us that nothing will exceed our strength. Otherwise we should be hindered in the attainment of our eternal destiny. And that is never God's will.

For we know in Christ that our highest aim is included in God's eternal, loving will. And the course of the world must absolutely conform to the eternal, loving will of God.

"For the sake of clearness, let us take an illustration. From the same centre describe three concentric circles, and we have three zones. In the inner zone may be placed all those things which we know it is the will of God to give us, that is, all things necessary for our sanctification, all spiritual blessings. For them we can pray with the assurance that God wills to give them to us. In the outer zone we may put those things which we know are *not* according to God's will, and for which it is therefore wrong to pray, such as the satisfaction of a vicious thirst for revenge, or success in some dishonest business venture. In the intermediate zone will be placed all that large class of temporal blessings which it may or may not be God's will to give us, such as restoration to health, or success in our temporal affairs, or continuance of prosperity. For these we must pray with the reservation that we ask them only if they be for our ultimate good, and therefore in accordance with God's will. In regard to the matter of prayer, then, we see that the condition is that it should be within the sphere of God's will, that is, something God wills to give us because it is for our good."[1]

But with this proviso, and with the clause, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine," added to our petitions, there can be no wrong in making our requests to God for every manner of blessing, material or other, and whether on our own behalf or on behalf of others. Here we may surely, with all confidence and with all reverence, invoke the analogy of human parenthood. No true earthly parent is offended or moved to impatience by his children expressing to him all their wants and wishes with perfect unreserve, even though his loving wisdom has anticipated their real needs, and will decide which of their desires may be granted; indeed the granting of those desires may depend to some extent upon the children's attitude, upon the filial, trustful, affectionate disposition they exhibit. So in regard to the supplications we address to our Father in Heaven: we cannot think of His being moved by our mere importunity, or by the mechani-

[1] A. G. Mortimer.

cal repetition of set phrases; but that the fulfilment of some wish of ours may be conditioned by our humility and confidence in expressing it presents no improbability. In any case, what is necessary on our part is that we should have faith, not only in God's *power* to grant our petitions, but in His *wisdom* in granting or refusing them as may be most expedient for us. We ourselves can, within limits, fulfil most of our children's requests; but a wise and loving parent will many a time say "No," when his child may marvel at what to him must seem a mere arbitrary or even unkind refusal of an innocent desire. That hapless man of genius, the late John Davidson, condensed the truth into one illuminating phrase when he spoke of prayer rightly uttered as "submissive aspiration"; it would be difficult to devise another form of words equally brief yet containing so much of the essence of the matter.

¶ Even petition for individual and material good is rational and morally justifiable if it be fused with the conscious submission of human to Divine will. A prayer of the Khonds, a tribe of Northern India, reads: "O Lord, we know not what is good for us. Thou knowest it. For it we pray." This recalls the prayer of Fénelon: "Lord, I know not what I ought to ask of Thee; Thou only knowest what I need. . . . Behold my needs which I know not myself. . . . Smite or heal; depress me or raise me up; I adore all Thy purposes without knowing them; I am silent. . . . I yield myself to Thee. I would have no other desire than to accomplish Thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thyself in me." So Socrates "prayed simply for things good, because the gods knew best what is good"; and St. Paul says that "we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us". Frederick Robertson has said, "That prayer which does not succeed in moderating our wish, in changing the passionate desire into still submission; the anxious, tumultuous expectation into silent surrender, is no true prayer, and proves that we have not the spirit of true prayer. That life is most holy in which there is least of petition and desire, and most of waiting upon God; that in which petition most often passes into thanksgiving." In prayer like this, petition itself has become acceptance. I do not merely surrender my will, I identify my will with God's, if I pray. "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."[1]

[1] M. W. Calkins, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, iv. 496.

2. If we are in doubt as to the will of God, there are two methods of coming to a decision. One is to take the Lord's Prayer as our model, the other to trust to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

(1) Christian prayer is modelled on the Lord's Prayer. "After this manner pray ye." Any other manner must be a wrong manner. We can use what words we please, but unless we have the manner, the method, the spirit of this prayer, we fail to pray aright: and our requests cannot be granted in the form in which we make them.

¶ Shortly before his death in 1870, Erskine of Linlathen received a letter from his old friend Carlyle, who, after referring to "our dim sojourn, now grown so lonely to us," writes, "'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy will be done;'—what else can we say? The other night, in my sleepless tossings about, which were growing more and more miserable, these words, that brief and grand Prayer, came strangely into my mind, with an altogether new emphasis; as if *written*, and shining for me in mild pure splendour, on the black bosom of the Night there; when I, as it were, *read* them word by word,—with a sudden check to my imperfect wanderings, with a sudden softness of composure which was much unexpected. Not for perhaps thirty or forty years had I once formally repeated that Prayer;—nay, I never felt before how intensely the voice of Man's soul it is; the inmost aspiration of all that is high and pious in poor Human Nature; right worthy to be recommended with an 'After this manner pray ye'."[1]

(2) We have the promise of the Spirit. "For we know not what we should pray for as we ought," but we have the Spirit in our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Christ frequently taught them how to pray; He unveiled the character of God who hears prayer; He gave them large promises to prayer offered in His name. But the occasions were rare on which He mentioned definitely subjects for prayer. In the Lord's Prayer, He had, indeed, under the seven comprehensive petitions, really included the desires and requests of His people, but the rest was left to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the growth of her sense of need in the Church from age to age.

[1] *Letters of Thomas Erskine of Linlathen*, ii. 324.

¶ While "nothing human holds good before God, and nothing but God himself can satisfy God," still it is possible for man to pray and to pray aright. For this is the revelation: God does Himself, by his Holy Spirit, help us to come into sympathy with His purposes and to ask according to His will. For the Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and while we know not what to pray for as we ought, maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.[1]

¶ Prayer is the breath of life, an effect of God's spiritual breathing, which no man can perform aright without the Spirit's breathing upon him. Therefore the Spirit is to be waited upon, for His breathings and holy fire, that the sacrifice may be living, and acceptable to the living God.[2]

The prayers I make will then be sweet indeed
If Thou the spirit give by which I pray:
My unassisted heart is barren clay,
That of its native self can nothing feed:
Of good and pious works Thou art the seed,
That quickens only where Thou say'st it may:
Unless Thou show to us Thine own true way
No man can find it: Father! Thou must lead.
Do Thou, then, breathe those thoughts into my mind
By which such virtue may in me be bred
That in Thy holy footsteps I may tread;
The fetters of my tongue do Thou unbind,
That I may have the power to sing of Thee,
And sound Thy praises everlastingly.[3]

III.

1. It is sometimes maintained that prayer can operate only in the spiritual region, and not in that which is subject to the reign of material law; or, in another way of putting it, that prayer should be only an offer to accept God's will, as expressed in the laws of His universe, and never an attempt to influence the incidence of those laws. But this distinction between the spiritual and the material spheres is as unphilosophical as it is unchristian.

[1] Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Miscellanies*, ii. 383.
[2] Isaac Penington. [3] Wordsworth.

It is unphilosophical, for it rests on the assumption that the material order is a closed circle, with whose necessary sequence spirit cannot interfere; whereas all the higher philosophy from Aristotle onwards has maintained that the universe is ultimately spiritual, and that matter, as we call it, is a manifestation and an instrument of spirit; while we exemplify the fact every time that our free-will intervenes in the current of events, and should be regarded as insane if we pleaded the opposite opinion in such a practical place as a court of law.

But, besides being generally unphilosophical, the distinction in question is more particularly unchristian. For Christianity is the religion of the Incarnation, of Spirit manifest in matter, of the Word made flesh. And this, its central doctrine, pervades its every detail, and characterizes it through and through. Its foundation, as Christians believe, was accompanied by miracles, expressly designed to prove Christ's mastery of material things. Its teaching was conveyed through parables that gave spiritual significance to all the material objects of the ordinary world. Its practice is sustained by sacraments, wherein material elements are consecrated to the assistance of our spiritual life, while it bids us venerate and discipline our bodies as being the temples of the Holy Ghost. Its whole purport, in a word, is to realize the truth, which philosophy and commonsense alike have recognized, that the material machinery of the world is subordinate to a spiritual purpose, in whose interest it is meant to be controlled. And it is in natural accordance with this that we are enjoined by Christ to pray for even so material a thing as our daily bread: while, at the same time, the fact of its being made an object of prayer, as well as the limitation itself of the petition, reminds us that our daily bread, as well as every other earthly blessing which the phrase may be interpreted to cover, is not to be wasted in selfish enjoyment, but used to sustain and increase the energies that minister, through the body, to our spiritual life. All temporal blessings, therefore, which, under this condition, may be legitimate objects of desire are also legitimate objects of prayer. And though personal petitions of this kind may diminish, in proportion as our life becomes more spiritual, the confidence with which they are offered will increase.

¶ The soul's true intercourse with God in either sphere must not be forgotten, nor the true harmony between His methods in either, nor the supreme end to which all prayer conduces, be ignored. It must have been through ignorance of these principles that, in the course of the controversy in 1872-73, an attempt was made to limit the action of prayer to the spiritual world only. Professor Tyndall did not, he said, contend for the extinction, but only for the displacement, of prayer, and in a subsequent paper on "The Function of Prayer in the Economy of the Universe," the Rev. W. Knight, in excluding prayer from the physical order, pleaded for its place and efficacy in the spiritual region. But, in reality, the intervention of a living, personal God in the world of spirit cannot, for long, be consistently maintained if, on the hypothesis that it is inconsistent with the reign of law, it be rejected in the world of matter. That such a distinction is illogical has been shown, in some forcible sentences, by the Duke of Argyll in his *Reign of Law*: "Whatever difficulties there may be in reconciling the ideas of Law and of Volition are difficulties which apply equally to the worlds of matter and of mind. The mind is as much subject to law as the body is. The reign of law is over all, and if its dominion be really incompatible with the agency of volition, human and Divine, then the mind is as inaccessible to that agency as material things." "It is hard," adds Professor Jellett, "to see how the principle here laid down can be disputed. When we ask God to grant us a spiritual benefit, we ask Him to intervene in the sequence of mental phenomena. If a change in the sequence of phenomena produced by the intervention of the Divine Will be a violation of law, we are asking for a violation of law; and this violation is equally unreal whether the interrupted sequence be in the world of matter or the world of mind." [1]

¶ It is arbitrary to confine petitionary prayer to religious objects or even to ethical; the petition for bread in the Lord's Prayer is clearly opposed to this super-spirituality.[2]

¶ It is worth noticing that almost every prayer addressed to our Lord in the Gospels is for some temporal blessing—usually for recovery from sickness, or some bodily infirmity. God would surely teach us that He desires that we should look to Him in all our necessities—for those things which are necessary as well for the body as the soul. Whatever it is lawful to desire, it is lawful to pray for; and as long as we pray in faith we cannot

[1] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 44.

[2] M. Kähler, *Berechtigung und Zuversichtlichkeit des Bittgebets*, 7.

be wrong, though of course we may be mistaken in what is for our real welfare. Faith includes submission to the will of God, and teaches us to trust "Our Father" as knowing better than we can know what things are really for our temporal and eternal good. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."[1]

2. But we have to keep in mind that Christ has taught us that we are to "seek first" the things which are spiritual and eternal. And so far from our losing by following this order, He has assured us that the lower good will be "added" to those who make it their main concern to win the higher. The request for 'daily bread" is a most legitimate request; but, if we are to pray "the Lord's Prayer," we must not begin with it.

It is probable that as the Christian character advances to maturity, and the vision of God becomes clearer, the disposition to seek for temporal good will become less and less eager if it does not wholly vanish away. For in His Presence the things which are often coveted so earnestly are apt to wear quite an altered aspect. If He speaks, and we hear Him, then "grief becomes a solemn scorn of ills". We glory even in infirmity, having the assurance of His grace. If Christ were to come to us at our prayers we could scarcely think of earthly advantages, unless, indeed, we ventured so far for some brother in distress. For ourselves, at such a time, what could we ask for but forgiveness, holiness, a heart to love Him better, a will more perfectly consecrated to His service? And when prayer is prayer indeed, it is as though Christ were there by our side, and we had come into the Holy of Holies. And even when no vivid sense of His nearness is granted to us, yet reflecting on the uses of adversity in sweetening and refining the souls of them that suffer, and observing how hard and unlovely the characters of those who have their portion in this world often are, we may well find that our lips falter as we begin to speak of our desire for those things which nature craves but which would appear to be of no great service to such as would have their place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

[1] R. E. Hutton, *The Crown of Christ*, ii. 138.

Observe the order of progress in the petitions contained in the Bible. More or less throughout the Old Testament, but especially throughout the earlier period, they gather round things material. Food, drink, and raiment—after these things the Gentiles seek, said Jesus; and the same might have been said of the average Hebrew. A perusal of Deut. xxviii. or Lev. xxvi. illustrates the things which even to the later Hebrews constituted a blessing and a curse, and there is much truth in Bacon's aphorism that "prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament". "The dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine" —these words of an ancient blessing find an echo very late in Hebrew religion. "Thy great goodness," to which Ezra refers in his prayer of confession, was represented by "a fat land, houses full of all good things, cisterns hewn out, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance."

Material and external blessings are the principal subjects of prayer in the Psalms. Account must be taken, in considering this matter, of changes which have taken place in the meaning of words by the legitimate spiritualizing effect of Christian use. "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation" (xxxv. 3) is a good instance of how a prayer for temporal deliverance has come to acquire the appearance of being a prayer for spiritual blessing. But although the Psalms are far more largely occupied with temporal and material than with spiritual needs, yet there are distinctly spiritual topics of prayer which fill a considerable place in them. These are: (*a*) communion with God, prayer for the intercourse of prayer, as in lxiii.; (*b*) forgiveness of sins, besought with the greatest earnestness in Ps. li. for its own sake, but more frequently taking the form of prayer for that deliverance from suffering and chastisement which was held to mark the forgiveness of sin; (*c*) Ps. cxix. stands on a different footing. It contains much prayer for a knowledge of God's will. The prayer for "quickening" seems distinctly to have a spiritual sense. The development of prayer in a spiritual direction has been carried some way in the Psalms, and prayer for external blessings has been cast in a form which will lend itself afterwards to spiritual interpretation.

In the New Testament, prayer is, as we might expect, predominantly for things spiritual. Doubtless material things could

not be altogether ignored or forgotten; had not the Master Himself taught His disciples to pray for bread, and had He not made upon them the impression that any request they made in His name would be answered? But requests by such men and in such a name would be overwhelmingly for things spiritual. Those whose ambition was to "abide in Him," would not be sorely troubled by ambitions of a worldly kind.

¶ I often think that the progress of religion is shown nowhere with more clearness than in the development that has slowly taken place in the character of prayer. So much of prayer has been on the *quid pro quo* principle. Men have tried to bargain with God, to talk Him round to their view of the case; to get Him to do something for them that He must not do for others, so that prayer has been really the earnest pleading that *our* will may be done, and not the Divine will. "O Allah, give me a hundred sequins," the Polynesian idolaters prayed, and whipped their unpropitious gods. But how different was the prayer on the lips or in the life of our blessed Lord?[1]

¶ Such was the society in which I was living at that age when a youth is so easily swayed; and I was studying books which taught eloquence, in which I desired to excel, seeking by means of the satisfaction of human vanity an end that was itself evil and vain, when in the usual course of reading I came to a book of one Cicero, whose eloquence, though not his character, is almost universally admired. This book of his is called the *Hortensius*, and contains an exhortation to the study of philosophy. That book changed my whole attitude, changed the prayers which I offered to Thee, and made all my desires and aspirations different from what they had been. All at once every hope that was set on vanity seemed worthless, and I desired with an incredible intensity of emotion the immortality with which philosophy is concerned, and I began to rise up that I might return unto Thee.[2]

¶ When our persuasion of the guidance and the goodness of God is firm and clear, prayer becomes a true pleasure and strength of soul. If our vision of God is unclouded, we are instant in prayer, and pray without ceasing. The fully believing spirit rejoices to be in perpetual communion with God. In work and worship, in joy and grief, in giving and doing, in hours of triumph and hours of trial, the surely persuaded soul casts itself upon God

[1] *George Henry Russell Garcia*, 205.
[2] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 24.

with the confidence of undoubting love. When God is the greatest of all realities to the soul, prayer is the sweetest of all rejoicings. The clear consciousness and firm conviction of God compel frequency and gladness in prayer.[1]

3. Last of all, let us not forget that prayer for material things may be denied because to grant it would be to the hindrance of spiritual things. Jeremiah, beyond almost any other prophet, was of a warm emotional nature, keenly alive to all that was going on around him; and with this he had a prophet's insight into the needs of his country, and all a prophet's readiness to respond to the touch of the Divine hand. A grievous drought had fallen upon Judah, so that "the gates thereof languish; they are black upon the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up". The prophet, interpreting this as a sign of Jehovah's anger, intercedes on behalf of his people: "O thou hope of Israel, . . . why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? Yet thou, O Lord, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not." But Jehovah replies that He will accept no intercession for the people. "Pray not for this people for their good. . . . I will not accept them; but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence." Again the prophet pleads in more beseeching tones, and again his intercession is rejected, even more decisively than before: "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people. . . . I am weary with repenting . . . I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, . . . and the residue of them will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, saith the Lord." It is one of the most pathetic situations in the Bible. The passionate, tender-hearted prophet wrestling in prayer for his people, and his prayer not granted! Here we come upon a profound piece of teaching. We must not expect God to give physical deliverance when we pray for it. There is a higher interest at stake, a higher law which must be obeyed. The prophet prayed for Israel's deliverance, but Jehovah revealed that His holy purpose must be accomplished not by deliverance but by punishment; the supreme spiritual law required that the doom of Jerusalem should not be deferred.

[1] J. W. Diggle, *Sermons for Daily Life*, 1.

The same profound lesson we learn in the Garden of Gethsemane. Even to the Well-beloved the Father denied the passing of the bitter cup; He must drink it; so supreme are spiritual over physical things. We can pray for the latter only conditionally: "Father, if it be possible: not my will, but thine, be done".

¶ As Jesus moved about, and men drew near to Him, nine times out of ten the things they cried for could scarcely be called spiritual at all. They prayed for sight. They prayed for physical power. They prayed that a son or daughter might be healed. They prayed in the wild uproar of the storm, "Lord save us from this tempest, or we perish". And what I say is that for one like Jesus, to whom the spiritual overshadowed everything, such ceaseless praying for the physical and temporal must have made heavier the cross He bore. It deepens the wonder of His patience to remember that. It sheds a light on His infinite compassion. Fain would He have been asked for deeper things, yet He never wearied in bestowing these things.[1]

[1] G. H. Morrison, *The Afterglow of God*, 16.

VI.

INTERCESSION.

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INTERCESSION.

1. "AND there were also with him other little ships" (Mark iv. 36). Our attention, as we read the story of the stilling of the storm, is given to the ship in which Christ and the disciples were. We do not notice that there were also with Him other little ships. But it is worth noticing. For if they suffered from the storm, they also got the benefit of the "great calm". And they never knew how it came to pass. They were out on the Sea of Galilee, along with the ship in which were Christ and the disciples. When the storm came down so violently, they too were tossed by the waves and in danger of being swamped. And then when He said, "Peace, be still," and there was a great calm, they enjoyed the benefit of the calm. How did it come about? How was it so sudden and so complete? It is probable that they never knew.

Tennyson says:—

> More things are wrought by prayer
> Than this world dreams of.

And the wonder of it is that the things which are wrought by prayer are often wrought on those who have not themselves prayed, and they may never know how their blessings came to them. Have we been rescued out of keen temptations? Have we been able to do some things for God, and to stand? Have we sometimes felt the peace of God which passeth understanding keep our heart and mind? We believe that it was in answer to prayer. But whose prayer? Not our own. A mother's prayer, perhaps. We cannot always tell. In all prayer there is mystery. But the mystery centres in intercessory prayer. That we should be blessed because of some other's prayer of faith; that our prayer of faith should be able to bless others—that is the mystery. But the examples of it are undeniable.

Four men carried a paralytic into the presence of Jesus, and when Jesus saw *their* faith, He said to the sick of the palsy,

"Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee". A woman came out of the Syrophœnician country and cried, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil". He answered and said unto her, "O woman, great is *thy* faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt".

(1) What is the secret? It is sympathy. The prayer that saves is the prayer that sympathizes. The boat in which Christ was and the other little boats were all suffering alike from the storm, and to sympathize is to suffer along with. The four friends of the paralytic felt with him as they felt for him. The Syrophœnician woman carried her daughter's illness as if it were her own. "Lord save *me*," was her cry. Why have we a Saviour who is able to save unto the uttermost? Because "himself took our infirmities, and bare our diseases".

(2) And the prayer of sympathy, if it is to be entirely successful, must be a prayer of faith. That is the other condition. We must believe that He is able to do this, and that He is willing.

> More things are wrought by prayer
> Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
> Rise like a fountain for me night and day. . . .
> For so the whole round earth is every way
> Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

¶ To God man is first an objective point, and then, without ceasing to be that, he further becomes a distributing centre, God ever thinks of a man doubly: first for his own self, and then for his possible use in reaching others. Communion and petition fix and continue one's relation to God, and so prepare for the great out-reaching form of prayer-intercession. Prayer must begin in the first two but reaches its climax in the third. Communion and petition are of necessity self-wide. Intercession is world-wide in its reach. And all true rounded prayer will ever have all three elements in it. There must be the touch with God. One's constant needs make constant petition. But the heart of the true follower has caught the warm contagion of the heart of God and reaches out hungrily for the world. Intercession is the climax of prayer.[1]

¶ I cannot contentedly frame a prayer for myself in particular without a catalogue for my friends; nor request a happiness wherein my sociable disposition doth not desire the fellowship of

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, 40.

my neighbour. I never hear the toll of a passing-bell, though in my mirth, without my prayers and best wishes for the departing spirit. I cannot go to cure the body of my patient, but I forget my profession and call upon God for his soul. I cannot see one say his prayers, but, instead of imitating him, I fall into supplication for him, who perhaps is no more than a common nature.[1]

I.

1. Intercession has, in every age, been the cherished practice of the people of God, cherished because it was felt to be a duty. "I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men. . . . This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." In these familiar words St. Paul seems to speak with all the force and authority of one who has been allowed to enjoy a clear revelation of the Divine will on this most important topic. His exhortation is rendered all the more impressive by the reference to the Divine desire for the salvation of all that immediately follows it. If it is the will of God that all men should be saved—and He, through His servant, exhorts us to intercede for all—it is clear that intercession must be, at least, one amongst the many means that God employs for the carrying out of His beneficent purpose. If, indeed, no such exhortation had been addressed to us, our natural instincts of Christian benevolence would have disposed us to intercede for our fellow-men. If we believe that it is right to pray for ourselves, we are inclined, almost without a second thought, to conclude that it must be equally right to plead for other people, and to take it for granted that if our prayers are to our own advantage, they must be equally effective and beneficial when offered for others.

When we find that, from the days of Abraham downwards, God's people have interceded for others, and have been encouraged to do so; when we notice that our Lord Himself prayed for others, and taught His disciples to do so, yes, even for those who despitefully used them; when we find St. Paul exhorting us, in the most emphatic way, to engage in intercession, the weight of a Divine authority in favour of the practice of intercession over-

[1] Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*.

bears all the objections to such a course that reason may present, and we conclude that our truest wisdom lies in doing just what we are told to do, even though our taking this course may seem to involve certain anomalies.

¶ My father was most thoroughly a man of prayer. He was often supplicating for himself; and, as for his intercourse with others, he was in the habit, as far as possible, of leaving no one with whom he felt himself in communion without praying with him. Never did he set out from home; never did he see any of us, or even a friend, set out, without assembling all the household to commend to the Supreme Head those who, however they might be separated from one another, were still one under His eye. So, too, the first thing he did on his return from a journey, after he had embraced us all round, was to return thanks to God for the protection He had vouchsafed to him and us, and for His mercy in reuniting us. Never did he sit down to table, were it only to take a basin of broth, without first bending his head a few moments to return thanks, whether he were in his room, or among his family, or at a table d'hôte surrounded by strangers. It was in this necessity which lay upon him to ask God's help in everything that he illustrated his view of the principle, "all things of God," his dogmatic expression of which has pained so many people. "We must go to God at once," he used to say to us, "and not wait till we have exhausted all other means. Before deciding on, or undertaking anything, whatever it be, we should never forget to ask counsel of the Lord." [1]

2. The prayers of the Bible are a singularly interesting and instructive study. They are more numerous than can well be imagined by those of us who have not devoted to them any special attention. One circumstance of special interest in such a study is this, that so large a proportion of the great prayers of the Bible are intercessions. Surely this feature in the great Bible prayers is noteworthy. It would seem that while all prayer is welcome in heaven—all true prayer, that is—a special welcome awaits the prayers we offer, not for ourselves, but for others.

(1) In the Old Testament prayers of intercession are not very numerous, but they are of great significance. It would not be unfair to estimate a man's religion by the earnestness with which he longs for the welfare of others; and love of the brethren will

[1] *The Life, Labours, and Writings of Cæsar Malan*, 334.

express itself, in normal circumstances, in prayer for them. Those who love them most and those who are most responsible for their spiritual welfare will be likely to pray most for them. It is, therefore, very fitting that the prophets, who in a special sense were charged with the religious welfare of Israel, should so often appear as intercessors. We think of them pre-eminently as preachers, but they had first pleaded with God for the men to whom they afterwards appealed in His name. Most of them must have been powerful, or at least impressive speakers. Their gifts and temperaments differ widely, but the passionate sincerity of such men as Elijah and Jeremiah must have produced a stupendous impression even upon audiences that were not disposed to accept their message; and we can well believe that a special efficacy was supposed to attach to their prayers.

Practically all the intercessory prayers of the Old Testament are offered either by prophets or by men—such as Abraham and Job—whom later ages idealized as prophets. Abraham's intercession for Sodom and for King Abimelech, and Job's intercession for his friends are characteristic: and their prayers are efficacious. "Abraham is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live." "My servant Job shall pray for you," that is, for the "orthodox" friends, who had not spoken of God the thing that was right. The historical prophets from Elijah onwards appear frequently as intercessors. Elijah prays for the restoration of the widow's son. Amos the stern, from whom one would expect little pity, pleaded twice that the blow should not fall upon Israel. King Hezekiah after the insulting message of the Rabshakeh, entreats Isaiah through the priests and two court officials to "lift up his prayer for the remnant that is left"; and the chronicler puts into the mouth of Hezekiah himself a very beautiful prayer to "Jehovah the good" for pardon for those who had earnestly sought their God, even though their conduct had not been ceremonially correct.

¶ The praying of others for us is a force to be reckoned—when we account for the startling variations of our life, its deflections, its unexpected reinforcements. In the prologue to the Book of Job we read: "And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings according to the

number of them all; for Job said: It may be that my sons have sinned and renounced God in their hearts". It is the anxious prayer of Job that we hear, but what followed upon that vicarious prayer? This only experience can teach. Other fathers have prayed for their children since that day, and their sons and daughters have been held back as by an Unseen Hand from the excesses and the stains of the world—they have been brought through their perilous journey unscathed, not alone because they prayed themselves, but because their father and mother rose up early and sanctified them and offered burnt-offerings for them. They have had great allies, and all about them the unseen "dynamic agencies of heaven".[1]

(2) In the Old Testament, intercessory prayer is usually offered for forfeited or imperilled lives; in the New Testament its object is usually the spiritual welfare of those for whom it is offered, as when Jesus prays that Peter's faith fail not; or Paul, that his Ephesian converts be strengthened with power in the inward man, or that the Philippians may abound more and more in love. There are occasional prayers for blessings of a more material sort. The elders of the church are to pray for a sick member, and Peter prays for the restoration of the dead Tabitha. The "great Prophet that should come into the world," like the ancient prophets, was great in intercession. He poured out His heart not only for His disciples, but for His murderers.

¶ Jesus, who has entire command of His time, chooses the Intercession as that on which He can best spend it, and ever liveth to make intercession for us.[2]

¶ As intercession for others, how prayer rises and swells into moral grandeur and moral worth! Jesus standing with His disciples about the table on which the sacrament of the last supper was yet to be celebrated, and as they were about to start for the garden across the brook Kedron, lifts His eyes to heaven. But He has already looked down through the ages, far across continents then unknown, and sees the fast gathering throng of His disciples; sees them toiling, witnessing, suffering for His sake; sees the faithful leaders in one generation die, and those of the next run to take their places; sees all the dreadful corruptions, all the stern conflicts, all the sad heresies and schisms, all the triumphs too, and growths as the blessed leaven slowly leavens

[1] Edward Shillito, *Looking Inwards*, 50.

[2] F. W. Crossley, in *Life*, by J. Rendel Harris, 174.

the whole lump; and as He looks on the whole up to the very end, He prays for all those who should believe on Him through the word of His apostles. And from this scene on earth we look reverently up to His throne in heaven, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us.[1]

(3) Intercessory prayer plays a great part in the life of St. Paul. It is the old story: the true prophet, the preacher who means what he says, will be an intercessor. The man who loves the truth and who also loves the men to whom he preaches it, will plead for them. So not only Paul's heart's desire, but also his supplication to God for the Jews, was that they should be saved. And once men have been won for Jesus, he prays that they may be sustained in the good life, and enabled to bring forth much fruit, and this to the ultimate end "that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified". He prays not only that they may do no evil, but that they may, in a spirit of blameless sincerity, do much good, especially that they may put into practice the Master's royal lesson of love to one another, and to all men.

So St. Paul tells us that Epaphras was always striving and labouring in prayer for the Colossians that they might be perfect and fully convinced in all the will of God. While Epaphras prayed, what happened at Colossæ? This the New Testament leaves untold. It would be little good to tell us; we must learn from experience what happened at Colossæ. While Epaphras prayed! Who, in the light of Christian experience, can doubt that souls in Colossæ found the shadows strangely lifted? They were led into a deeper insight into the will of God; they received a new power to preach Christ; they were made brave who before had been timid; they were made quick with the love of Christ who had almost lost their faith. All this and more took place, while in Rome their friend and Apostle strove with God in prayer and worked mightily for their salvation.

¶ While Epaphras prays to-day, what happens? He may be thousands of miles away; he may be in China and his Colossæ in London. But we must not forget him when in a certain church some harassed soul finds rest; when this man is dragged with the fire on his garments from destruction; when this one passes into the joy of his Lord by the way of the Cross; when

[1] J. O. Murray, in *Princeton Sermons*, 206.

underneath some fellowship of Christians there is a strange arm outstretched. That arm is the intercession of the redeemed taken into the intercession of the Redeemer. For He takes for Himself the "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints". All this we shall not know until we

> Stand with Christ in glory,
> Looking o'er life's finished story.[1]

¶ In that brief but all-embracing intercession with which the Bible closes we have intercession at its highest level: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come. Amen: come, Lord Jesus." Notice the combination, the threefold cord which cannot be broken. There is the prayer of the Spirit. St. John, like St. Paul, brings the action of the Spirit into close relation with the prayers of the Christian faithful. "The Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered". "Through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ"—it is by this that outward events are turned to our salvation. Just as the true life for the Christian means to walk in the Spirit, so true Christian prayer is prayer in the Spirit. The Spirit prays, and the Bride, the Church, the Spirit-bearing body, prays too. And the individual disciple contributes his voice to theirs; "he that heareth," he has his part in the threefold strain of intercession. "Come, Lord Jesus." The prayer is short, but it covers all that we can pray for.[2]

3. With such examples before us, we cannot afford to neglect intercession. Indeed, we may well ask whether we have given anything like an adequate place to this most blessed and wonderful gift from God. The Rev. J. R. Miller has in one of his books a chapter entitled "The Sin of Not Praying for Others," and he writes: "Perhaps we are not accustomed to think of praying for others in just this way as a duty, the omission of which is a sin against God. We think of it as a privilege, but scarcely as a part of love's solemn duty. We are in danger of narrowing our prayers to ourselves and our own wants. We think of our own sorrows and trials, our own duties, our own work, our own spiritual growth, and too often do not look out of the window upon our friend's rough path or sore struggle. But selfishness

[1] Edward Shillito, *Looking Inwards*, 51.
[2] G. A. Cooke, *The Progress of Revelation*, 160.

in praying is one of the worst forms of selfishness. If ever love reaches its best and purest, it ought to be when we are standing before God." Not praying for others is a sin of omission which should be sincerely repented of, and of which no Christian should be guilty again.

Suppose you are interested in a case of sickness, and you believe your prayer has had an effect which otherwise could not have been achieved, does not this commit into your hands an awful responsibility? What if you forgot to pray? Or suppose that there is another sick person for whom there is no one to pray, and that person therefore dies. Is it either wise or fair for God to allow such things to depend upon such precarious conditions? But, taking this argument on its own merits, it could be pressed much further. Is it also wise or fair that such matters as procreation, education, and the administration of justice should be so largely committed to the will and power of man? These great things are in our hands, that we should learn to realize both our dependence and our responsibility.

What about those who have practically none to pray for them, or to pray for them in particular? What of those for whom we should have prayed and have neglected to do so or to pray with perseverance and love? Do they suffer loss—unending loss—through our neglect? This, of course, is really but one of the problems suggested by the consideration of what is clearly a fact—the solidarity of the human race, our dependence one upon another in all sorts of ways and for all sorts of purposes. As a matter of experience, we do suffer by reason of one another's faults of omission, and this not only in lesser and external matters but also in the more serious concerns of the moral and spiritual life. How far such losses may be irremediable we are not told. The Judge of all the earth, we know, will most assuredly do right. He will certainly take into consideration all the circumstances of each individual soul. None, we may be sure, will finally be lost who has not deliberately and persistently rejected God. The losses short of final ruin which any may suffer through others' failure to give brotherly help of any kind would suggest matter for self-examination and humiliation before God rather than for speculation as to His dealings.

¶ When Bacon fell, and when Andrewes had to sit in judgment upon the Lord Chancellor's distractingly sad case, he remembered how that great man had been used to call him his inquisitor, but Andrewes had secret remorse to the day of his death that he had not early enough and often enough been Bacon's intercessor.[1]

II.

1. But what is the worth of intercessory prayer? Its worth is manifold, and, like mercy, "it is twice bless'd; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes".

If there be no other result of our prayer, it will certainly have its effect in a changed attitude on our own part. No one can pray honestly for another without working for him, and so helping to answer his own prayer. The case of the Apostle Paul is a conspicuous example. Yet there is no reason for confining the influence of our prayers to such reflex action. As the Father of spirits, God has direct access to the spirits of all men; and we know not what part in the complex system of spiritual influences through which His Kingdom is advanced may be played by the prayers offered in faith and love by Christians on behalf of their fellows who are in need. Here the example of Jesus is full of instruction. No one knew so well as He the loving purpose of the Father towards His children; yet this did not prevent Him from praying for them. If we pray for men in the spirit of Jesus, we may be sure that our prayers will not be in vain. Intercession is love at prayer. Every true exercise of it deepens our interest in others, and develops in us a sympathy which must have its ultimate effect upon the happiness and well-being of the world. As William Law has said, "Intercession is the best arbitrator of all differences, the best promoter of true friendship, the best cure and preservative against all unkind tempers, all angry and haughty passions". Besides, the interest in men which lies behind intercessory prayer will, if it be genuine, also be likely to express itself practically. "He who prays to God to make men happy will do what he can to make them happy himself." He will hope, bear, believe, and do all for the man for whom he prays; and so its influence upon himself in restraining

[1] A. Whyte, *Lancelot Andrewes and his Private Devotions*, 44.

impatient and uncharitable tempers, and its influence, through him upon the world, will be very great.

¶ Intercessory Prayer *is* a powerful means of grace to the praying man. Martyn observes that, at times of inward spiritual dryness and depression, he had often found a delightful revival in the act of praying for others, for their conversion, or sanctification, or prosperity in the work of the Lord. His dealings with God for them about these gifts and blessings were for himself the divinely natural channel of a renewed insight into his own part and lot in Christ, into Christ as his own rest and power, into the "perfect freedom" of an entire yielding of himself to his Master for His work.[1]

(1) First of all, in intercessory prayer we find an outlet for those cares and anxieties which we cannot help entertaining with regard to others—and often the only outlet. There is, for instance, distance. He or she in whom we are interested may be in another hemisphere. We cannot stretch out our hand to their assistance. Our voice will not reach them. Any assistance we might be able to furnish them with would be too late ere it could find them. But we have in intercessory prayer a mode of communication swifter than the telegraph or the telephone. God is near to us, and equally near to them. We can send them our message through Him, and that with the certainty that no time will be lost on the way, and that it will infallibly reach the ears for which it was intended.

Intercession is perhaps the easiest branch of prayer. It is no uncommon complaint among religious people that they can pray far more earnestly for others than for themselves. Many a one has been able to pour out the whole heart in an agony of intercession for some beloved one in an hour of danger—a parent or child, or a brother or sister—who has been staggered and dismayed at the coldness and deadness of his heart in his ordinary prayers for himself. This is, however, not really a matter of surprise. The fervour and intensity of the intercession is the fruit of the human love which prompts it. The feelings are stirred in a degree which is perhaps impossible in the more purely spiritual act of the communing of the soul with God as to its own needs and condition. No doubt it is a witness to the

[1] H. C. G. Moule, *All in Christ*, 100.

infirmity of our fallen nature that our own spiritual wants stir our feeling so languidly. But we must not be cast down because we find that the element of human love can give a life and fervour to our prayers which nothing else can. It is probably a necessity of our present state that it should be so. And if such is our own experience, we should simply bow our heads, and confess with shame how little our own soul's needs affect us, thanking God that He has shown us what true fervent prayer may be, and asking Him to pardon the lack of warmth we mourn over in our devotions, and to accept them for Jesus Christ's sake. After all, love is a grace which is of God, who "is Love," and He who has planted this fair plant of love in our hearts will not scorn the prayer to which it lends its fragrance.

(2) Not only so, but as the habit of praise intensifies our love of God, so the habit of intercession intensifies our love of man. The more we pray for our fellow-men, the more inevitably we yearn to help them; and this yearning quickens our energies and enlarges our capacities for helpfulness in a way and to an extent that we cannot fail to recognize as part of the answer to our prayer.

(3) Intercession for others is often the easiest way to break up the stupor, the insensibility, of our own hearts. We are not always in the spirit of prayer. Sometimes the wheels drag heavily, and it is a labour and a task. Let us, however, only turn aside from the consideration of our own wants and desires, and contemplate the necessities of others and pour out our supplications for them, and the soul will awake from its torpor; faith will find its wings, and will soar joyfully towards God. That which cramps the soul and drags it to the earth is its selfishness. Now selfishness is both unhappiness and feebleness. Let selfishness depart, and the heart glows with a generous affection, and the spirit is stronger to grasp for another than when it grasps for itself. When intercession is Divinely inspired and controlled, and directed towards those ready to benefit by it, it will naturally be free from all taint of selfishness, and will be prompted purely by the love of souls and a desire for God's glory. Where our own interests or our happiness in life is involved by the actions of others, it is easy to see that there is a danger of our being actuated in our prayers for these by the

desire to escape from annoyance or actual suffering and distress, and he would be a harsh critic who stigmatized such prayers as selfish in their character. Still, it is possible, no doubt, that in offering such prayers we may be thinking more of the relief that a favourable answer might bring to us than of the value of the human soul for which we pray, or of the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ.

¶ In the life of Frank Crossley it is told how one day in 1888 he had said good-bye at the station to his friends, General and Mrs. Booth; but before they steamed out he handed a letter to them giving details of a sacrifice he had resolved to make for the Army. He came home, and was praying alone. "As I was praying," he said, "there came over me the most extraordinary sense of joy. It was not exactly in my head, nor in my heart, it was almost a grasping of my chest by some strange hand, that filled me with an ecstasy I never had before. It was borne in on me that this was the joy of the Lord." So this servant of God made in his pilgrimage to God an advance from which he never fell back. He thought it likely at the time that the Booths had read this letter in the train and this was an answer to prayer of theirs; afterwards he heard they *had prayed for him* in the train just after getting well out of Manchester.[1]

(4) Intercession brings with it one further result. Our moral rights over men, our influence, our power, if need be, to rebuke, our power to guide and teach and help, depend on our intercession on their behalf. Amos the prophet, taken "from following the flock," goes forth in quiet confidence on his mission of judgment and restoration, but he has prayed first of all that the threatened judgment may be turned away: "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small". With his fellow-countrymen Amos suffers the agony of the judgment which it is his duty, as a prophet, to proclaim. And it is only when we have thus entreated for men, when we have represented them before the throne, when we come forth from intercession at the mercy-seat, that we can exercise over them the moral rights with which we are entrusted.

¶ It was a remark of General Gordon's that it makes a great difference in our feeling towards a stranger if before we meet him we have prayed for him. And we may with equal truth

[1] Edward Shillito, *Looking Inwards*, 51.

say that it makes a great difference in the feelings of others towards us if they have reason to believe that we have prayed for them. St. Paul, therefore, gives himself this advantage. He says, "God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you, always in my prayers". Then he goes on to tell them that he not only prays for their welfare, but prays that he may have the advantage of seeing them face to face and knowing them. And here he puts his desire to see them on the true ground. He wants to visit them because he has something of the utmost value to give them—that he may "impart unto them some spiritual gift".[1]

¶ If you should always change and alter your intercessions according as the needs and necessities of your neighbours or acquaintance seem to require, beseeching God to deliver them from such and such particular evils, or to grant them this or that particular gift or blessing, such intercessions, besides the great charity of them, would have a mighty effect upon your own heart, as disposing you to every other good office, and to the exercise of every other virtue towards such persons as have so often a place in your prayers. This would make it pleasant to you to be courteous, civil, and condescending to all about you, and make you unable to say or do a rude or hard thing to those for whom you had used yourself to be so kind and compassionate in your prayers. For there is nothing that makes us love a man so much as praying for him; and when you can once do this sincerely for any man you have fitted your soul for the performance of everything that is kind and civil towards him. This will fill your heart with a generosity and tenderness that will give you a better and sweeter behaviour than anything that is called fine breeding and good manners. By considering yourself as an advocate with God for your neighbours and acquaintance you would never find it hard to be at peace with them yourself. It would be easy to you to bear with and forgive those for whom you particularly implored the Divine mercy and forgiveness. Such prayers as these amongst neighbours and acquaintance would unite them to one another in the strongest bonds of love and tenderness. It would exalt and ennoble their souls, and teach them to consider one another in a higher state, as members of a spiritual society, that are created for the enjoyment of the common blessings of God, and fellow-heirs of the same future glory.[2]

[1] Bishop Gore, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, i. 54.

[2] William Law, *A Serious Call*, chap. xxi.

2. It is hard to conceive of an influence more likely to preserve in temptation and to strengthen for duty than the knowledge that prayers are offered on our behalf, or even the memory of prayers once offered. The voices, some hushed, that once pleaded with God for us—voices of father or mother or some faithful friend—plead with us still, and it is hard to resist such a plea. It can awaken old and blessed memories, stir a long-slumbering conscience, stifle the incipient passion, quicken the better nature, brace, strengthen, and purify. Jesus interceded for Peter that his faith should not fail, and, in a crucial moment, it failed: he denied and cursed and swore. Nevertheless the prayer bore fruit; for afterwards he wept bitterly and became one of the Master's mightiest servants. Verily great is the power of intercession.

Oh, if our ears were opened
To hear as angels do
The Intercession-chorus
Arising full and true,
We should hear it soft up-welling
In morning's pearly light,
Through evening's shadows swelling
In grandly gathering might,
The sultry silence filling
Of noontide's thunderous glow,
And the solemn starlight thrilling
With ever-deepening flow.

We should hear it through the rushing
Of the city's restless roar,
And trace its gentle gushing
O'er ocean's crystal floor;
We should hear it far up-floating
Beneath the Orient moon,
And catch the golden noting
From the busy Western noon,
And pine-robed heights would echo
As the mystic chant up-floats,
And the sunny plain resound again
With the myriad-mingling notes.

There are hands too often weary
With the business of the day,
With God-entrusted duties,
Who are toiling while they pray.

They bear the golden vials,
And the golden harps of praise,
Through all the daily trials,
Through all the dusty ways.
These hands, so tired, so faithful,
With odours sweet are filled,
And in the ministry of prayer
Are wonderfully skilled.

There are noble Christian workers
The men of faith and power,
The overcoming wrestlers
Of many a midnight hour;
Prevailing princes with their God,
Who will not be denied,
Who bring down showers of blessing
To swell the rising tide.
The Prince of Darkness quaileth
At their triumphant way,
Their fervent prayer availeth
To sap his subtle sway.

And evermore the Father
Sends radiantly down
All-marvellous responses,
His ministers to crown;
The incense-cloud returning
As golden blessing-showers,
We in each drop discerning
Some feeble prayer of ours,
Transmuted into wealth unpriced,
By Him who giveth thus
The glory all to Jesus Christ,
The gladness all to us![1]

(1) Intercessory prayer presents to us one of the profoundest mysteries of the spiritual life. Our character and destiny are open to the influence of the prayers of others, as theirs are to ours. At first sight it is an appalling thought that we should be exposed to the prayer-influence of our short-sighted fellow-creatures; that their prayers should be capable of giving new form and direction to our lives, and that we likewise should have such

[1] Frances Ridley Havergal.

influence by prayer over them. It is thus we are beset before and behind by unseen powers, whose action we cannot prognosticate or control, and life passes largely into the hands of others. This may be accepted as part of the Divine order. Prayer can never be confined to petitions for the desires of self; and immediately it passes beyond, it becomes intercession, and intercession from its very nature ceases to be prayer if faith in its efficacy be evacuated by the suspicion that those for whom we pray are not affected by God through our prayers. The great intercessory prayer of Jesus for His disciples and for the world would lose its significance if prayer made no change in their or the world's condition. It would be nothing more than a pious delusion.

¶ No one can visit a children's hospital without seeing in the most touching form that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. Some people seem to imagine that that saying in the Bible is an arbitrary command imposing an arbitrary punishment on the human race; but one hour spent in that children's hospital will show that it simply states a fact of human nature. As you see the poor little child die in front of you for no fault of its own, as you see the illness brought on it by its father's sins kill it before your eyes, you see, in a way which you will never forget and can never efface from your mind, that God has disallowed the claim of the individual man to stand on his own base. He shows us that He has bound us together by such ties of brotherhood that no man can live to himself, and no man can die to himself. It is a monstrous injustice that that little one should die for the sins of its parents, unless in the brotherhood of man, in the solidarity of humanity, God was preparing some better thing for us which more than counterbalanced the terrible mischief which comes from it. And in intercession, in the death of Christ upon the cross, and His ceaseless intercession, we see what the good was. If a man claims to stand on his own base, then he must give up speaking of being saved by Jesus Christ. It is because we are a brotherhood that we can be saved by Another. And we see that God's great plan was this: to send through the channels of brotherhood the freshening, reviving grace to press back that poisonous mischief which had come through the same channels. And it is a man's sense of fairness, his belief in the justice of God, that makes him believe that, if mischief comes through the brotherhood to one another, then intercession, joined to the intercession of Jesus Christ, is one of the means by which the influence of others can tell upon the human race.[1]

[1] A. F. W. Ingram, *Banners of the Christian Faith*, 78.

(2) Intercession is apt at first sight to seem more mysterious than other prayer, because, while we can readily understand that the co-operation of each man's own free-will is an essential condition of his personal ability to receive grace from God, it is not so easy to conceive how or why the action of one man's free-will should influence God's blessing of another. But mysterious though the subject is, there are analogies that at least throw light upon it. For it is a fact of experience that God's government of man is partly effected through human mediation. The man who uses his faculties and capacities aright thereby helps his fellow-men; while the man who misuses them deprives his fellow-men of the help that they might otherwise have had. Nor does this hold good only in secular affairs; on the contrary, it is nowhere more apparent than in spiritual things. The prophet, preacher, teacher, artist who "stirs up the gift that is in him" advances the spiritual life of his fellows by the fact; while the man who might have been such an one, yet wraps his talent in a napkin, leaves his fellows spiritually the poorer. And God allows it to be so. If, then, prayer be the powerful force which we believe it to be, its intercessory operation would be strictly analogous to the other actions of human free-will, and the use of it a part of that general responsibility which our freedom entails.

¶ Such is the love of God towards us, such the dignity which He bestows upon us, to be co-operators with Himself, that man's fervent cry for others who never pray for themselves, inspired by Himself, upheld by His own grace of "hope against hope," obtains that last first grace which won the hitherto obdurate rebel to Himself. God's word guarantees this, when it bids us pray "for all men," because God "will have all men to be saved". God's word is justified in act by the known instances of those whose souls He has saved through prayers which He Himself inspired. Witness he, the great teacher of the Church till now, of whom, though unknown in the flesh and known only through the eminence of his rebellion, it was said: "it is not possible that the son of those tears should perish"; who himself, when converted, owned himself to be the fruit of those nine years' unbroken, unfaltering prayers of his mother St. Monica, who lived for his conversion and, when this object of her being was accomplished, yielded up her own soul to God.[1]

[1] E. B. Pusey, *Occasional Sermons*, 298.

¶ I remember speaking in the Boston noonday meeting, in the old Broomfield Street M. E. Church on this subject one week. Perhaps I was speaking rather positively. And at the close of the meeting one day a keen, cultured Christian woman whom I knew came up for a word. She said, "I do not think we can pray like that". And I said, "Why not?" She paused a moment, and her well-controlled agitation revealed in eye and lip told me how deeply her thoughts were stirred. Then she said quietly "I have a brother. He is not a Christian. The theatre, the wine, the club, the cards—that is his life. And he laughs at me. I would rather than anything else that my brother were a Christian. But," she said, and here both her keenness and the training of her early teaching came in, "I do not think I can pray positively for his conversion, for he is a free agent, is he not? And God will not save a man against his will." I said to her: "Man *is* a free agent, to use the old phrase, so far as God is concerned; utterly, wholly free. *And* he is the most enslaved agent on the earth, so far as sin and selfishness and prejudice are concerned. The purpose of our praying is not to force or coerce his will; never that. It is to free his will of the warping influences that now twist it awry. It is to get the dust out of his eyes so that his sight shall be clear. And once he is free, able to see aright, to balance things without prejudice, the whole probability is in favour of his using his will to choose the only right." [1]

(3) Unless we are dogmatically determined to reject all testimony which bears on this subject, there seems no escaping the conclusion that specific prayers have been specifically, directly, and unmistakably answered in instances too numerous to admit of explanation by coincidence. The volume of human testimony bearing on this subject is too great to be swept aside by a simple refusal to consider it; if there is no insurmountable logical obstacle to the possibility of prayer proving objectively effective —and we have tried to show that there are no such obstacles— we must examine the alleged instances of such answers without prejudice; and if we do so, then, after making all legitimate deductions, we shall still find a body of residual fact which is not to be explained away.

He who prays much for individuals and keeps a record of intercession has a vast accumulation of evidence that for affecting others nothing we do is so potent as prayer. The hidden lines of communication running between soul and soul are insufficiently

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, 192.

explored. But telepathy is a convenient name for a fact which every intercessor has frequently experienced. It seems as if something of this kind happens: when you begin to pray, you get quickly on to a plane of being where distance does not count; you are at once by the side of the person you pray for, in the next room or on the other side of the globe. But your influence on the person in that region of experience is much more powerful than it is in the more superficial intercourse of early life. You reach the soul. And you bring with you co-operant forces. To your amazement you find afterwards that your prayer has brought miraculously, as it seems, comfort and strength; it has stirred the will, at that distance, to act; it has set in motion helpers or directors who come to the aid of the distracted or the suffering or the sinful.

¶ Some close observers of the Lord's ways have recorded it as their experience that their intercessory prayers have been answered more distinctly and palpably than their prayers for themselves.[1]

¶ You never know where a prayer's power will land—in a human heart that needs it, or with God who hears it. Norman Macleod tells of a boy's cry to Heaven for the sake of a drunken man who used to come to see him as he lay sick and dying. When he had drink, he used to pass the door softly, ashamed to look the little one in the face. But one night he heard the thin voice beating at Heaven's door with its cry, "Oh, Father! don't let him be drunken any more, he is so good and kind, and I love him". The strong man listened, caught at the heart, and when he entered he went down upon his knees beside the dying child, and said through big, bitter tears, "Were you praying for a waif like me?" "Yes," said the boy, "I was praying for you. I aye do that. You're no a waif"—he didn't know the word—"you're a man." Many a night, as he drove his cab along the weary streets, out of the grave came that pinched face, lit by love, to his heart, and the haunting, "You're no a waif, you're a man," made him at last stand firm, rooted in manhood through a child's weak dying prayer, heard in a city stair by night.[2]

¶ I have myself experienced what is recorded of Spurgeon, though I prefer to hint at the fact as it is recorded by him. There came into his vestry a woman who had believed in Christ, but the trouble was the indifference or unbelief of her husband. Spurgeon without a moment's hesitation proposed that they

[1] W. Binnie, *Sermons*, 117. [2] L. Maclean Watt, *God's Altar Stairs*, 9.

should pray for him. They knelt down and asked that he might seek Christ and be saved. As they prayed in the vestry, the man was reached in his home. When the woman returned she found her husband seeking salvation.[1]

¶ Some years ago, the record of a wonderful work of grace in connexion with one of the stations of the China Inland Mission attracted a good deal of attention. Both the number and spiritual character of the converts had been far greater than at other stations where the consecration of the missionaries had been just as great as at the more fruitful place. This rich harvest of souls remained a mystery until Hudson Taylor on a visit to England discovered the secret. At the close of one of his addresses a gentleman came forward to make his acquaintance. In the conversation which followed, Mr. Taylor was surprised at the accurate knowledge the man possessed concerning this Inland China Station. "But how is it," Mr. Taylor asked, "that you are so conversant with the conditions of that work?" "Oh!" he replied, "the missionary there and I are old college mates; for years we have regularly corresponded; he has sent me names of enquirers and converts, and these I have daily taken to God in prayer." At last the secret was found! A praying man at home, praying definitely, praying daily, for specific cases among the heathen. That is the real intercessory missionary.[2]

¶ As for myself I do esteem nothing out of Heaven, and next to a communion with Jesus Christ, more than to be in the hearts and prayers of the saints.[3]

¶ And as for ourselves, may we not more and more rejoice to be borne onward by the arm of Christ? Time was when we girded ourselves; but one day we shall submit with joy to be girded by Another. Once we were proud to choose our way; then it will be our one desire that He will keep our feet from straying. And at last we shall cry in our weariness—

> Carry me over the long last mile,
> Man of Nazareth, Christ for me.

In Christ we shall know that there meet, fused in one awful energy of love, all that we have ever prayed ourselves, all that others have prayed for us during the long years of life, all the prayers of the dead and of the living, and the eternal intercessions of Him who loved us even until death. All are answered in the Unseen Arm that upholds us—in the pierced hands "which are lifting us over the ford".[4]

[1] R. F. Horton, *My Belief*, 185.
[2] E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer*, 130.
[3] *Letters of Samuel Rutherford.*
[4] Edward Shillito, *Looking Inwards*, 53.

VII.

THANKSGIVING.

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THANKSGIVING.

ADORATION is devout meditation on what Jehovah *is*—the praise of the Divine perfections. Thanksgiving is delighted meditation on what the Lord has *done* for us or others—praise for His mercies. Such praise is "comely". Just as there is meanness in constant murmuring, so there is a gracefulness and a majesty in habitual gratitude. And it is "pleasant". It is not the full purse or the easy calling, but the full heart, the praising disposition, that makes the blessed life; and, of all personal gifts, that man has got the best who has received the quick-discerning eye, the promptly-joyful soul, the ever-praising spirit.

Prayers of thanksgiving, however superficially related to prayers of adoration, yet differ from them in requiring a less exclusive absorption in God, in starting from the sense of human satisfaction, human delight, which is then attributed to God as cause: "Oh that men would praise the Lord," cries the Psalmist, "for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men". Prayers of thanksgiving belong to very primitive peoples; and in sacrifice one often finds concrete expression of gratitude. Such sacrifices, exemplified by first-fruits, ceremonials, and burnt-offerings, are most often accompanied by verbal expressions. "Even the savage," Jevons asserts, "who simply says 'Here, Tari, I have brought you something to eat,' is expressing thanks, albeit in savage fashion."[1]

¶ It is unfortunately too true that prayer is most commonly associated with the idea of *getting* something; whereas thanksgiving, as its name betrays, means the *giving* of something—it is an act of sacrifice. It is indeed a sad consideration how few are "found to give glory to God" among all the recipients of His grace. Thanksgiving, one would suppose, would be spontaneous and inevitable.

I do but sing because I must,

[1] M. W. Calkins, in *The Harvard Theological Review*, iv. 493.

said Tennyson. But how few Christians manifest the spontaneity of the linnet's song, and sing because they must. How few ever have a heart so bursting with grateful emotion that they must withdraw to some solitude where their tears of praise may overflow, and their swelling gratitude find relief in adoration and thanksgiving.[1]

I.

1. Thanksgiving is a necessary part of every complete prayer, as necessary as supplication. It is the sign that the prayer is in faith. For it is not enough to ask; we must also believe that we have received. Thanksgiving is the acknowledgment that our prayer has been answered and that we have received that which we asked. If we look at St. Paul's Epistles, we frequently find petition mentioned with thanksgiving accompanying it. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. iv. 6). It is probably intended to suggest the attitude of appropriation as well as of supplication. Prayer is asking; thanksgiving is testifying that we have received. It is just here that we fail; we ask, but we do not accept and appropriate. Faith in Scripture is twofold in meaning. There is the faith that *asks* and the faith that *accepts*. The faith that asks is expressed in petition; the faith that accepts is expressed in thanksgiving. We are continually asking, but have we the faith that appropriates? A Christian man went to lunch with an intimate friend whom he had known for twenty-five years, and after "grace" was said, the ordinary phrase being used, asking to be "made truly thankful," the guest, claiming the privilege of friendship, inquired, "When do you expect to get that prayer answered? You have been praying all these years to be *made* thankful!" The man had been "asking," but never appropriating. He had the faith that asks, but not the faith that accepts. Many a Christian would find life more powerful and blessed if he knew a little more of the faith that appropriates, faith that expresses itself in thanksgiving, "O God, I *thank* Thee!" We may see this in the Revised Version of Mark xi. 24, "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye *have received* them, and ye shall have them". Let us not fail to accompany our prayer with this appropriation of thanksgiving.

[1] C. Silvester Horne, *The Life that is Easy*, 147.

2. Thanksgiving supposes and includes everything which is characteristic of godliness.

(1) *It is the guardian of doctrine.* St. Paul, in a profound analysis of the decline of faith, makes the first step of that decline unthankfulness. When men knew God, "they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful" (Rom. i. 21). When they ceased to acknowledge God, He was gradually expelled from their thoughts, and soon disappeared from their creed. Atheism and idolatry are not intellectually attained; a man never reasons himself into these positions; they are the necessary result of spiritual insensibility. It is well for the Church to guard her doctrines by definition, and for the purposes of instruction and unity to fix them in formulas and catechisms, but these make a frail defence where the heart is not right with God; and even where these are not, the faith is safely housed if there be a doxology in the heart. To thank God is to acknowledge His creative power, His supreme providence, His unfailing bounty, and the multitude of His tender mercies. Thankfulness is not a poetical musing on the Divine perfections, but a glad sense of benefits personally received, fixing the attention of the mind directly upon the Giver, and with such dispositions as insure communion with the Giver. There will necessarily be prayer and confiding trust and love. God will be rich towards such a mind; it shall not be allowed to go astray.

(2) *It is the process of holiness.* There may be some difference in our manner of stating the doctrine of holiness, but we are agreed in substance as to the nature of holiness. The root of holiness is consecration to God. This is where it begins: "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body" (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20). The idea here is the absolute giving away of ourselves to be the possession of another. This is the practical acknowledgment on our part of the purchase by which we cease to belong to ourselves. The blood shed for us by Christ makes us the simple property of Christ. Now this act of giving ourselves to God is not a single transaction, a business concluded once for all; it is living in the spirit of consignment. It is only by repeated acts of personal dedication that we can maintain the

consciousness that we belong to another. Our freedom of will and the ordinary motives of our life seem to proclaim that we are our own masters, and in the sense of personal responsibility we are. In our intercourse with men we govern ourselves. The faculties of self-control are never in abeyance, and unless we live in the spirit of consecration we soon cease to feel that we are bought with a price, and the claims of redemption, if not formally disputed, are like the dead letter of a bond no longer in force.

(3) *It is the inspiration of union.* The operation of thankfulness in this direction is seen at once in that well-known passage: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul" (Ps. lxvi. 16). In our notes of triumph, we are not satisfied unless others share the joy. If at such seasons the heart could have its way, if the expression of its gladness were not restricted by pride, fear, or expediency, we should call together our friends and neighbours and say unto them, "Rejoice with me!" (Luke xv. 6). Their joy increases ours. By a sympathy which is one of the great sources of human strength, they make the subject of our triumph their own. This communion in the property of joy extends to the property of sorrow, to the demands also of work and conflict, and is the essence of Church union.

¶ Prayer is sometimes exercised as a duty and a task; on its supreme planes it is eagerly resorted to as a joy. A part of the true conception of true intercession consists in giving pleasure to our God. To supplicate on behalf of another, and to do it with the reluctance and misgivings of a bondman, cannot be "well-pleasing unto the Lord". It is our high privilege to enter the Presence-chamber like children going home; and to name our fellow-pilgrims with the happy assurance that the very intercession is consonant with "the river of God's pleasures". Thus "the joy of the Lord" will be our strength. Let us ever supplicate for others as though we had infinite resources in the goodwill of the Lord, and so let us "with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation".[1]

II.

1. No duty in the life of prayer would appear to be more in accord with man's true nature, none more delightful, than thanks-

[1] J. H. Jowett, *The High Calling*, 10.

giving, and yet none is so neglected, or, if recognized, so perfunctory. If prayers of thanksgiving were commoner, the whole life would be indefinitely enriched. The eye would ever be kept awake and clear for the hundred tokens of a Father's love that fall unnoticed about our path every day, and the heart would be more sensitive and responsive to the great salvation. We are far enough yet from the enthusiasm of the New Testament. Perhaps indeed that can never be quite recalled. The men who had looked upon the face of Jesus or stood very near Him in history, and who had literally seen the world turned upside down by His gospel, must have been moved, as it is hardly possible for us to be moved who have been born into an atmosphere more than nominally Christian—a world whose type of civilization has, generally speaking, been created by Christianity; a world which is, indeed, far enough from being in all its departments controlled by the Christian spirit, but which nevertheless can show much genuinely Christian thought, activity, and aspiration. It may be that, in a world so different, that ancient enthusiasm can never be altogether repeated. Nevertheless, the thanksgiving of the New Testament remains an eloquent rebuke to our more sluggish Christianity, and a standard to which it must be continually recalled.

¶ I have looked through volumes of modern sermons at times to gain inspiration on this theme; but how seldom do we read or hear one on the duty of thanksgiving. Our hymns are often morbid and introspective, whereas the Psalms are a well of joyous worship, and Christ and His Apostles stand before us as leaders in a tribute to God's goodness and love. Again and again have I turned from theological treatises and the ordinary literature of to-day to the words of a prophet like John Ruskin, that I might catch the strain of a grateful heart, and learn anew that the worship of God is to rejoice in Him and to swell the grand chorus of praise which all Nature presents.[1]

2. Why is thanksgiving neglected? In the words "forget not all his benefits," the Psalmist of the 103rd Psalm unveils the real cause. It is simply the want of recollection, the failure to gather up all the varied threads of the Divine grace and goodness with which, in all its stages and under all its conditions,

[1] Leonard E. Shelford, *By Way of Remembrance*, 96.

our life is intertwined. That such forgetfulness would certainly produce ingratitude is the theme of constant warning in the Book of Deuteronomy, penetrated by its all-absorbing sense of personal devotion to God. And the forgetfulness is traced to its source. With prosperity the heart would be "lifted up," and dependence on the Divine Benefactor would be ignored, if not resented. In the New Testament, the duty is no less earnestly and constantly impressed, although one might have supposed that, when the "inestimable love" of God had been revealed "in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ," no exhortation, beyond the statement of this fact, would have been required. To St. Paul, perpetual joy, unfailing prayer, unbroken and universal thanksgiving constituted the Christian ideal, "the will of God in Christ Jesus".

It is more than coincidence that the Apostle's plea for thanksgiving is followed by the words, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. iv. 8). Thanksgiving cannot be pumped up from an empty mind and a dried heart. It must flow forth from a full spring. The best way to secure it is to store the mind with worthy themes. If we think on the things that have praise and virtue, the stream of thanksgiving will break from the rockiest heart. We are encouraged in this connexion by considering the habits of singing souls. They have accustomed themselves to walk on lofty levels within sight of the majesty of God and beside the cataracts of redemptive love. Their haunts are Alpine heights, not valley paths, nor the streets of a city. They breathe an ample air. Their sanctuary is spacious. It is to be noted also that they tread the Via Dolorosa frequently. Their feet are often found on Calvary's hill. The light of the cross shines about them, and the sight of the dying Saviour awes them into tremulous love. Men and women with such habits never want for themes of thanksgiving. They dwell among the splendours of the Divine revelation, and it quickens their praise anew each time they lift up their eyes.

¶ "God give you a good day, my friend," said Tauler of Strasburg to a beggar whom he met at a time when he was seek-

ing a deeper knowledge of God. "I thank God," said the beggar, "I never have a bad day." Tauler, astonished, changed the form of his salutation. "God give you a happy life, friend." "I thank God," said the beggar, "I am never unhappy." "Never unhappy!" said Tauler; "what do you mean?" "Well," rejoined the beggar, "when it is fine, I thank God; when it rains, I thank God; when I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry, I thank God; and since God's will is my will, and whatsoever pleases Him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?" "But what," said Tauler, "if God were to cast you hence into hell—how then?" Whereat the beggar paused a moment, and then lifting his eyes upon him, he answered, "And if He did, I should have two arms to embrace Him with—the arm of my faith, wherewith I lean upon His holy humanity, and the arm of my love, wherewith I am united to His ineffable Deity; and thus one with Him, He would descend thither with me, and there would I infinitely rather be with Him than anywhere else without Him." "But who are you?" said Tauler, taken aback by the sublimity of the reply. "I am a king," said the beggar. "A king!" said Tauler; "where is your kingdom?" "In my own heart," said the beggar.[1]

3. Why is it difficult to be thankful? If we feel to-day that we ought to be thankful, and if we know that hitherto thanksgiving has formed too small a part of our devotions, what is wanted in order that we may do better for the future, what is the preparation of the heart that we shall need in order that we may be able to praise?

(1) Before praise there must be penitence. "Praise is not seemly in the mouth of sinners." Sin, unrepented sin, is the great hindrance to praise. Let this be our first consideration if we resolve to-day that for the remainder of our lives we must praise and thank the Lord for His goodness. Let us resolve, with God's help, to cease from all wilful sin. Let us think what would have troubled us most if we had been called during these last months to render up the account of our lives; and let us, by God's help, put that right, whatever it may be. Penitence must come before praise.

(2) But then we may still ask the question, Why is it hard

[1] E. W. Moore, *The Christ-Controlled Life*, 5.

to be thankful? Why do we find it hard to express our thanks for a kindness that we have received? Why is it difficult to say "Thank you"? The cause of our difficulty is our pride; we do not like to seem to be dependent upon any one; we like to assert our independence and to claim what we have as our right. This discloses our second need. If we desire to-day to be thankful and to praise, first we need penitence, and secondly humility. We must acknowledge our dependence upon God; we must fall down and worship Him.

¶ I will thank Him for the pleasures given me through my senses, for the glory of the thunder, for the mystery of music, the singing of birds and the laughter of children. I will thank Him for the pleasures of seeing, for the delights through colour, for the awe of the sunset, the beauty of flowers, the smile of friendship, and the look of love; for the changing beauty of the clouds, for the wild roses in the hedges, for the form and the beauty of birds, for the leaves on the trees in spring and autumn, for the witness of the leafless trees through the winter, teaching us that death is sleep and not destruction, for the sweetness of flowers and the scent of hay. Truly, O Lord, the earth is full of Thy riches!

And yet how much more I will thank and praise God for the strength of my body enabling me to work, for the refreshment of sleep, for my daily bread, for the days of painless health, for the gift of my mind and the gift of my conscience, for His loving guidance of my mind ever since it first began to think, and of my heart ever since it first began to love. Oh, from what unknown errors has He guarded me, from what beginnings of sins has He kept me back! I will praise Him for my family, my father and my mother, my brothers and sisters, my home, for my husband, for my wife, for the kindness of servants, and the love of children.

These are but a few things we can call to mind instantly when we think attentively and reverently of our creation and preservation and of the blessings of this life; but what shall we say when we think of our redemption and of the hope of the life to come? What does it mean? That I am in the kingdom of heaven, that I am a member of Christ and a child of God, that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me, that there is pardon for all my sins, that I have the means of grace and the hope of glory. What can I say to all this but "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thy sin, and healeth all

thine infirmities; Who saveth thy life from destruction; and crowneth thee with mercy and loving-kindness"?[1]

Ye are always singing the good Lord's praise,
And publishing all that His hand
Has wrought for you in the bygone days,
And all that His heart has planned.

And verily all that ye say is true;
For I gratefully confess
That whatever the Lord has done for you
He has done for me no less.

But when I remember the weary ways
Which my feeble feet have trod,
And the human love which all my days
Has helped me along the road,
Then the love of man is my song of praise
As well as the love of God.

And I hardly think that I would have seen
The love of God so clear,
Unless the love of man had been
So visible and near.

III.

1. Perhaps the most remarkable difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is the shifting of the emphasis from petition to thanksgiving. The Old Testament is indeed a glad book. Worshipping a God of salvation, a God who had saved and who could save in real and tangible ways, the people could not but be happy in their worship. This at least was the mood of pre-Exilic times. From the Exile onwards, the religion became much more sombre; but joy was far from being obliterated. The call to "give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever" is peculiarly frequent in post-Exilic times. The 107th Psalm is an eloquent and grateful testimony to the goodness of Jehovah. Many of the later psalms form one continuous shout of jubilation, and some of the later prayers acknowledge very fully the goodness of God to Israel in history. Nevertheless, petition vastly outweighs thanksgiving. With a deepening recognition of the majesty of

[1] Bishop Edward King, *Sermons and Addresses*, 38.

God, petition becomes more reverent. The old complaints, in which man spoke to God as to a friend with whom he was angry, become fewer and fewer. They are common still in Jeremiah; but, except for the Book of Job, which is practically a dramatic poem, and some stray utterances in the Psalms, complaints practically disappear. With the coming of Jesus, however, the absence of complaint merges into positive thanksgiving. "Father, I thank thee"—that was the motto of Jesus. The change is very obvious in the prayers of His greatest disciple. The Epistles of Paul are crowded with prayers of thanksgiving, and this proportion between thanksgiving and petition is an altogether new thing in prayer.

2. But is there any thanksgiving in the *Lord's Prayer?* Without doubt it includes an unexpressed thanksgiving. Indeed the whole prayer supposes the experience of the grace of God, although this experience is not directly mentioned. May not the simple "my father," or "my mother," in a child's mouth, carry with it such a tone as to express a warm, heartfelt gratitude for all blessings received? When, then, in such a tone of heart and voice we say, "Our Father which art in heaven," do not these words include a sense of gratitude for every grace and gift which has descended on us from above, from our Heavenly Father? Every single manifestation of God's care is a revelation of His *Fatherly* love and mercy towards us. Who can pray in earnest concerning God's name, His kingdom, or the forgiveness of sins, without having first consciously realized that He has revealed His name to us, founded His kingdom of grace among us, promised and imparted forgiveness of sins to us? But whoever truly realizes all this will certainly render thanks for it, render thanks even in silence. The two things, indeed, are one.

3. Songs of praise are unusually abundant in the Book of Revelation. Day and night they rise from the lips of the four living creatures to Him that sitteth upon the throne. And the reason why the great multitude in heaven rejoices and gives the glory to God is because Christ has conquered the world, and He shall reign for ever and ever. The scene is set in heaven, and the vision is a vision of faith, not of reality; yet, though of faith, it

is intensely real. The writer sees, if only with the eye of faith, what Jeremiah had longed to see, and was perplexed and grieved because he could not see—the manifest vindication of the moral order, the indisputable triumph of the Kingdom of God. "We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, because thou hast taken thy great power and didst reign." He had proved Himself more than a match in the struggle with the cruel powers of evil. Salvation and power belonged to Him, because He had "judged the great harlot and avenged the blood of his servants". They had poured out the blood of the saints and prophets, "and blood hast thou given them to drink: they are worthy". Therefore Hallelujah, and again Hallelujah. Yes, "righteous art thou, true and righteous are thy judgments". It is the contemplation of the Divine justice, of the thoroughness and terribleness of the Divine judgment upon the gigantic forces of evil, of the victory of right and good and God—it is these things that stir the writer's blood. In its longing for a vindication of the moral order by the Divine vengeance upon all opposed to that order, this great literary witness to the spirit of Jewish Christianity stands very near the Old Testament. But the book, though intensely Jewish, is also intensely Christian. It draws its inspiration, if not always from the spirit of Jesus, at any rate from an absolute faith in Him, an immovable confidence in His power and ultimate victory. This confidence is enthusiastically shared by all the writers of the New Testament; and so it is fitting that although the New Testament doxologies are usually offered to God, there is at least one undisputed doxology to Christ. "To him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen."

¶ How can man effectually ascribe to Christ "glory and dominion for ever and ever"? Not merely by uttering Amen, but by *living* Amen. To use the grace of God's most bountiful salutation, thereby attaining His peace, constitutes us His faithful servants and patient saints; servants who shall see His face and serve Him in perfection; saints in whom He shall be glorified when He cometh to be admired in all them that believe. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Lord Jesus, what joy was that, what covetable good, for whose sake Thou didst endure the Cross, despising the shame? Not for glory and dominion for ever and ever simply and for their own sake. Already Thou hadst glory with the Father before the world was, and dominion

and fear were with Thee before man transgressed Thy commandment. Nay, rather, it was that as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so mightest Thou rejoice over us. If Thou hadst given no more than all the substance of Thy house for love, it might have been contemned: but Thou hast given Thyself. What shall we give Thee in return? What shall we not give Thee?[1]

IV.

1. Thanksgiving is with joy. It is the expression of the glad heart. That is why the Book of Psalms is a book of joy: it is a book of thanksgiving. This old Hebrew classic has gone through the generations of men as an angel of the presence of the Lord, entering into the huts of the lowly and filling them with the radiance of God, penetrating the gloom of the palace and making it as the sanctuary of the Highest, lighting the path of the weary pilgrim in the valley of the shadow of death, spreading with plenty the tables of life even in the presence of enemies, and filling him with the assurance that God will lead him in the path of life, until he stands in that presence where there are fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. Like the good shepherd, it has led the flock of God beside the still waters of peace and into the green pastures of truth. Like a conquering general, it has braced the sacramental hosts of God for the fight against evil and for righteousness and liberty. It has been medicine to the diseased, an anodyne to care, a solace for the sad, a herald of deliverance to the imprisoned, courage for the despondent, a light shining in the dark places of life, and an unfailing fountain of joy. The religion of the Psalms is the religion of thanksgiving, of triumphant joy in God; and the book itself is, excepting one, the best commentary upon the words, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth God". That other and better exposition is the New Testament. It takes the songs of the prophet-poets and sets them in a new key. It makes it possible for men to surpass the heroism of the martyrs of the Maccabean time, and to exhibit a steadfastness of purpose and fulness of joy, and even exultation of soul in tribulation, which show that they ascended to higher ranges of life than the finest of the Hebrew race before. It is the fruit, no doubt, of the principles which Christianity takes up

[1] Christina G. Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 18.

out of the Old Testament, but it is expressed with greater clearness and force in the concrete example of Jesus Christ Himself, and demonstrated in a great series of historic facts, of which He is the centre and the source. The three thousand on the day of Pentecost scarcely had met together before it is remarked that they ate their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people.

¶ One reason why prayers of thanksgiving are relatively far fewer in the Old Testament than in the New is that fulness of joy is possible only to those who are partakers of the salvation proclaimed and wrought by Jesus. But even in the Old Testament there is a deep under-current of joy. The religious festivals of pre-Exilic times were happy gatherings at which men rejoiced and were glad, as they looked at the produce of the field and vine-clad hill-side, and reminded themselves of the Divine goodness; and even post-Exilic religion, though in many ways sombre, is also glad. Worship was solemn but happy.

> "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving,
> And into his courts with praise:
> Give thanks unto him and bless his name.
> For Jehovah is good; his love is everlasting." [1]

¶ It is told that when the New England Colonies were first planted, the settlers endured many privations and difficulties. Being piously disposed, they laid their distresses before God in frequent days of fasting and prayer. Constant meditation on such topics kept their minds gloomy and discontented, and made them disposed even to return to their Fatherland with all its persecutions. At length, when it was proposed to appoint a day of fasting and prayer, a plain, common-sense old colonist was in the meeting, and remarked that he thought they had brooded long enough over their misfortunes, and that it seemed high time they should consider some of their mercies—that the colony was growing strong, the fields increasing in harvests, the rivers full of fish, and the woods of game, the air sweet, the climate salubrious, and their homes happy; above all, that they possessed what they came for, full civil and religious liberty. And therefore, on the whole, he would amend their resolution for a fast, and propose in its stead a day of thanksgiving. His advice was taken, and from that day to this the festival has been an annual one.[2]

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 62. [2] S. Conway.

2. The joy comes when we recognize the Giver more than we appreciate the gift. What can bring us such joy in prayer as the knowledge that we are in a Father's immediate presence? How many Christians are listless and irregular in their prayers because they have no clear conception of the nature of God. He is only a vast and distant abstraction to them, so that they cannot concentrate their thoughts upon Him. Because He possesses no reality, no tender personality for them, their prayers are cold, lifeless, unreal. They drop out of prayerful habits altogether, because prayer never seems to do them any good. What is the cure for such a miserable state of things as this? It is of little use to tell them that when they are able to pray the least they need to pray the most. That is true enough, but it does not cure the evil. What will give back to their prayer its old joyfulness? What will make prayer once again in their lives a glad spontaneous exercise of soul, rather than a dreary and irksome duty? Only a new vision of the Father who is good unto all. Let them dwell upon that Name until it becomes instinct with new meaning. Let them feed upon it in thought until it lays hold of them with all the power of its tender import. Let them gaze up into the darkness with the word "Father" upon their lips, until a Father's face shines out of the black vacancy, until a Father's arms appear outstretched in love, until a Father's voice falls upon their waiting ears saying, "My child, come near to Me". Then all the dull, dreary unreality will vanish from their devotions. Prayer will become a new thing to them, transformed, irradiated, glorified by the tender beauty of that vision, and the little child will not find more joy in the presence of an earthly parent than the Christian will find in his intercourse with God.

¶ Prayer is an expression of the faith which lays hold of the reconciliation and filial relation offered us by God's grace, and which makes joyous gratitude the normal and fundamental mood of the Christian. Therefore it must be in its essence thanksgiving. The view that petition or confession is the rule, and that thanksgiving is a kind of prayer that is offered only in the event of the fulfilment of petitions or of a particular manifestation of grace, is a view that suits only religions in which God is chiefly one who gives men their desires, or else legal religions.[1]

[1] J. Gottschick, *Ethik*, 137.

¶ In thanksgiving we rightly appreciate what has been experienced by us. We not only regard the gift, but also take account of the Giver; we not only make clear to ourselves what has been wrought, but also remember the Worker. An occurrence which moves us to thanksgiving has become to us a revelation of God. So far as we are able to give thanks, so far God is manifest to us in His working.[1]

[1] A. Schlatter, *Das Christliche Dogma*, 220.

VIII.

The First Principles of Prayer.

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THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF PRAYER.

THERE is an aspect of the Christian doctrine of prayer which seems to be sadly overlooked. It is the necessity of our fulfilling those conditions of obedience, trust, and service on which alone God can give us the richest of His spiritual mercies. Is there not something amounting almost to mockery in the way in which we often ask for the highest spiritual blessings, and then give no thought to fulfilling in our lives the conditions on which alone they can come to us? Perhaps this failure to grasp the deeper import of prayer has its roots in the idea that prayer is mere petition. If, however, we perceive that prayer springs from and expresses the Christian life in all its depths of conviction and devotion, we must see that there are conditions of receptiveness on our part which must be fulfilled, if our prayers are to avail before God. Do we not often pray for blessings which we are all unfitted to receive? Would we not do well to pray that God would make us able and fit to receive His gifts, to open our eyes that we might see them, and our hearts that we might be able to take them? They wait to descend upon us. They will wait no longer than the time when they can wisely be given.

The conditions of prevailing prayer are not all of the same importance. They may be divided into First Principles, Personal Demands, and Minor Aids. In this chapter we shall consider the three First Principles.

I.

ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD.

The one principle, out-ranking all others, first and supreme, which governs prayer is God's purpose. The petitioner is placed by the nature of the case where he must recognize the sovereignty of God. Every prayer must conform to the Divine will. We

are living in God's universe and are part of it. His we are by right of creation, preservation, and redemption; placed here not to interrupt His plans but, by co-operation with Him, to accomplish His purpose. Prayer, therefore, is not dictation, is not advice, but the request a child makes of its parent, trusting superior wisdom, reposing in undoubted love, and desiring success in no particular petition which may be inconsistent with general and permanent welfare.

Suppose, then, that two men, meek, lowly, righteous, agree to ask for rain, let us say, or for the recovery of some friend who is tossing to and fro under the grip of some dire disease, or for the patients in a hospital, or in all hospitals, or for the conversion of some sinner, or of all sinners—will their prayer, in its real essence and import, be answered? Will their desire, in its real intensity, be granted? Assuredly it will, if the exceeding great and precious promises which are written in the volume of the book be indeed "yea and amen". Why, then, are any sinners unconverted? Why are any of the diseased unhealed? Why is there any distress at all? Why is there any anguish of nations, any inward commotions, or mutual antagonisms? Why are there any wars? Why any woes? Is it because the prayers of the righteous for the great masses of the world have been withheld? No; for Jesus prayed, and Paul prayed, and John prayed, and Elijah prayed. Is it then because their earnest energizing prayers have been unanswered? No; for the promises are "yea and amen". What then? The whole difficulty takes flight when we notice that in a meek and lowly and holy soul there cannot be unconditional or absolute desires for any of the objects specified. All desires for such objects are desires with an underlying condition expressed or understood. They are petitions dependent on other elements of desire, which spread out wider and draw deeper. And these underlying desires are but partial aspects of one great element of desire which absorbs within itself all details of desire. Minute details of desire are never absolute, and never detached. They are all and always but partial aspects of one great desire. That great desire is this—that God should do, in every given case or conjuncture, what it would be wisest and best, all things considered, and all interests consulted, for Him to do—what would be most in harmony with our moral

constitution and with His own moral government. In its ultimate and sublimest form it is this—"Thy will be done."

1. The will of God gives us the due and necessary limit of prayer. There are many things for which we never think of asking, simply because they are not only not included in, but are clearly opposed to, His revealed will. There are other matters about which we are certain that they are according to His will, and as to these we plead His promises and continue praying, waiting, expecting the answer in God's good time. Yet again, there are many things about which there is no revelation in the Word of God, and with reference to these we pray in submission to the will of God, and wait His way of revealing to us in daily circumstances and experience whether the prayer is in harmony with His purpose concerning us. This spirit of submissiveness is one of the primary conditions of prayer and one of the essential marks of a true spiritual life. Our Lord, in Gethsemane, prayed in this spirit, "Not my will, but thine, be done," and when the soul is ready to trust God fully and rest on His perfect wisdom, the joyous experience is that of the Apostle when he said, "This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John v. 14).

¶ But is not the promise in Mark ii. 24 an unqualified one? Yes, but within the limits that are well understood to exist between the two contracting parties. Here is a man with a well-defined plan for a house. He turns the work over to the contractor, with a promise to supply whatever he might want. Very soon there comes a request for an extra supply of material to erect a few towers which in the opinion of the contractor would very much beautify the building. Here is a father who has a plan for his boy's future. He sends him to college, saying, "Send to me for whatever you want and you shall receive it". In a few months the boy sends home for an extra supply of cash for certain side-issues of questionable propriety. Each of these requests are properly denied. And yet each of the petitioners might say that the promise was unqualified.[1]

2. But how can we know if what we ask is in accordance with the will of God? Just this is the difficulty. More than one believer says: "I do not know if what I desire be according

[1] W. E. Biederwolf, *How can God Answer Prayer?* 183.

to the will of God. God's will is the purpose of His infinite wisdom: it is impossible for me to know whether He may not count something else better for me than what I desire, or may not have some reasons for withholding what I ask." Every one feels that with such thoughts the prayer of faith, of which Jesus said, "Whosoever shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith," becomes an impossibility. There may be the prayer of submission, and of trust in God's wisdom; there cannot be the prayer of faith. The great mistake here is that God's children do not really believe that it is possible to know God's will. Or if they believe this, they do not take the time and trouble to find it out. What we need is to see clearly in what way it is that the Father leads His waiting, teachable child to know that his petition is according to His will. It is (1) through God's holy Word, taken up and kept in the heart, the life, the will; and (2) through God's Holy Spirit, accepted in His indwelling and leading, that we shall learn to know that our petitions are according to His will.

(1) *Through the Word.*—There is a secret will of God, with which we often fear that our prayers may be at variance. It is not with this will of God, but His will as revealed in His Word, that we have to do in prayer. Our notions of what the secret will may have decreed, and of how it might render the answers to our prayers impossible, are mostly very erroneous. Childlike faith as to what He is willing to do for His children simply keeps to the Father's assurance that it is His will to hear prayer and to do what faith in His Word desires and accepts. In the Word the Father has revealed, in general promises, the great principles of His will with His people. The child has to take the promise and apply it to the special circumstances in His life to which it has reference. Whatever he asks within the limits of that revealed will, he can know to be according to the will of God, and he may confidently expect. In His Word, God has given us the revelation of His will and plans with us, with His people, and with the world, with the most precious promises of the grace and power with which through His people He will carry out His plans and do His work. As faith becomes strong and bold enough to claim the fulfilment of the general promise in the special case, we may have the assurance that our prayers are heard; they are

according to God's will. Take these words of John: "If any man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and God will give him life". Such is the general promise; and the believer who pleads on the ground of this promise prays according to the will of God, and John would give him boldness to know that he has the petition which he asks.

(2) *Through the Spirit.*—The apprehension of God's will is something spiritual, and must be spiritually discerned. It is not as a matter of logic that we can argue it out. God has said it; I must have it. Nor has every Christian the same gift or calling. While the general will revealed in the promise is the same for all, there is for each a special different will according to God's purpose. And herein is the wisdom of the saints, to know this special will of God for each of us, according to the measure of grace given us, and so to ask in prayer just what God has prepared and made possible for each. It is to communicate this wisdom that the Holy Ghost dwells in us. The personal application of the general promises of the Word to our special personal needs—it is for this that the leading of the Holy Spirit is given us.

¶ I count it one of the most precious lessons God wants to teach through the experience of George Müller, that He is willing to make known, of things of which His word says nothing directly, that they are His will for us, and that we may ask them. The teaching of the Spirit, not without or against the Word, but as something above and beyond it, in addition to it, without which we cannot see God's will, is the heritage of every believer. It is through the Word, and the Word alone, that the Spirit teaches, applying the general principles or promises to our special need. And it is the Spirit, and the Spirit alone, who can really make the Word a light on our path, whether the path of duty in our daily walk or the path of faith in our approach to God.[1]

3. Sincere prayer is answered although the will of God is not clearly seen. Even to the purest and most devoted souls, that will may for a time remain obscure and inscrutable. Paul prayed, not once, nor twice, but thrice, for the removal of the thorn; and Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with crying and tears that the terrible cup might pass from Him. In the strict sense, neither of these prayers was answered. The cup had to be drained

[1] A. Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 263.

to the dregs—" My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" —and the flesh continued to be tormented by the thorn. Yet in the deepest sense these prayers were both answered. Overshadowing the prayer for the removal of the cup and the thorn was the prayer that the will of God be done, and that prayer was abundantly answered. By each of the sufferers that will was accepted, and in it they found strength and peace. Paul learned a more abundant experience of the Divine grace through the strength which he felt to possess him even in his weakness, so that the very rejection of his prayer became to him a gracious and brilliant answer. So it was with our Lord. He was heard, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us. The cup was not removed, but strength was given Him to drink it. From His knees He rose victorious; and in the strength that came upon Him after the agony of His prayer in the garden, He stepped quietly forth to face treachery and death.

Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forspent, forspent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forspent with love and shame.
But the olives they were not blind to Him,
The little gray leaves were kind to Him:
The thorn-tree had a mind to Him
When into the woods He came.

Out of the woods my Master went,
And He was well content.
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When Death and Shame would woo Him last,
From under the trees they drew Him last:
'Twas on a tree they slew Him—last
When out of the woods He came.[1]

4. Obedience to the will of God is not mere submission, mere resignation. It is not always acquiescence, even in prayer. We obey God as much when we urge our suit, and make a real petition of it, as when we accept His decision; as much when we try to change His will as when we bow to it. The Kingdom of

[1] Sidney Lanier.

Heaven suffereth violence. There is a very fine passage in Dante, *Parad.* xx. 94 (Longfellow's trans.):—

> *Regnum coelorum* suffereth violence
> From fervent love, and from that living hope
> That overcometh the Divine volition;
> Not in the guise that man o'ercometh man,
> But conquers it because it will be conquered,
> And conquered conquers by benignity.

It is His will—His will of grace—that prayer should prevail with Him and extract blessings. And how we love the grace that so concedes them! The answer to prayer is not the complaisance of a playful power lightly yielding to the playful egoism of His favourites. "Our antagonist is our helper." To struggle with Him is one way of doing His will. To resist is one way of saying "Thy will be done". It was God's will that Christ should deprecate the death God required. It pleased God as much as His submission to death. But could it have been pleasing to Him that Christ should pray so, if no prayer could ever possibly change God's will? Could Christ have prayed so in that belief? Would faith ever inspire us to pray if the God of our faith must be unmoved by prayer? The prayer that goes to an inflexible God, however good He is, is prayer that rises more from human need than (where Christian prayer should rise) from God's own revelation or from Christian faith. It is His will, then, that we should pray against what seems His will, and what, for the lower stage of our growth, is His will. And all this without any unreality whatever.

¶ Let us beware of a pietish fatalism which thins the spiritual life, saps the vigour of character, makes humility mere acquiescence, and piety only feminine, by banishing the will from prayer as much as thought has been banished from it. "The curse of so much religion," says Mr. Meredith, "is that men cling to God with their weakness rather than with their strength." The popularity of much acquiescence is not because it is holier but because it is easier. And an easy gospel is the consumption that attacks Christianity. It is the phthisis of faith.[1]

¶ Prayer is the voice of one who was created free, although he was born in chains; it is at once self-assertion and self-

[1] P. T. Forsyth, in *The London Quarterly Review*, July 1908, p. 21.

surrender; it claims a will even in surrendering it, when it says, "Not my will, but thine, be done." It is, perhaps, the greatest of all witnesses to the spiritual nature of man, as nothing so dignifies human nature, or so enhances the sense of its fixed relation with the Divine as does prayer, the true conception of which involves the idea of a certain power possessed by humanity over God. Neither is there any such other witness to man's spiritual freedom as is wrapped up in prayer, man's permitted, though submitted, wish and will and choice. When God gave man reason, says Milton, He gave him freedom to choose, for freedom is but choosing. Prayer is God's acknowledgment, His indorsement of His own gift of freedom to man; it is His royal invitation (an invitation which has in it the nature and force of a command) to man to exert this privilege, to use this power. It is God the Almighty who says, and who says to man, "Ask me concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me."[1]

5. Prayer according to the will of God is not the annihilation of the human will, it is the annihilation of all that in the human will is selfish. In prayer the profoundest act of conscience and obedience is inwardly accomplished, for prayer is a laying hold and appropriation of God only in so far as it is likewise a sacrifice; and we can receive God into us only when we likewise give ourselves to Him. He who offers no sacrifice in his prayer, who does not sacrifice his self-will does not really pray. But this sacrifice of surrender and obedience is true and pure only when it is the sacrifice of free love, when under it the position of the servant is transformed into that of the child. By such a sacrifice, in which self-will dies, room is gained within for God the Lord, whose place within us is otherwise occupied by the selfish desires, the world and its images.

¶ The launching of a selfish wish into the unseen world, in the dim hope that it will become operative through the good-nature of a Being who has infinite power to do as He will, is not in any sense prayer at all, for it is not offered to God as God;—it does not seriously profess to desire that God should be more and more in the universe, and selfish creatures less and less; it is not, in short, addressed to the perfect righteousness and perfect love, but only to the most potent of administrative agencies; it is directed, not to the infinite purity, but to a mighty Executive

[1] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 129.

of the universe, and would be addressed to that mighty Executive much more hopefully if infinite good-nature instead of goodness were His essence. Now this is certainly not, in Christ's sense, prayer at all. In His sense, it is of the very essence of prayer that it aims at the establishment of the Divine will, and the annihilation of all that is inconsistent with that will. It is not to God's omnipotence primarily, but to His spiritual nature, that Christian prayer is addressed; the whole purport of it being that the unity of the Divine Kingdom may be asserted and its laws established. If this be not the first condition of any petition, then in the Christian sense that petition is not prayer at all. Prayer is not a short and easy cut to the thing next your heart; but the chief method by which the eager and short-sighted and imperfect mind gradually learns to purify itself in the flame of Divine love.[1]

II.

In the Name of Christ.

In the parting words of Christ to His disciples He gave them His most important lesson concerning prayer. He fastened to their prayer an amazing possibility in the expressions "whatsoever," "anything," "what ye will"; but a new and necessary element was disclosed to them in these last hours. They had been taught to pray and how to pray, but not to pray *in His name*. This was henceforth to be their plea and their power. They were unworthy; He was worthy. This was to be their confidence. That name would forever be recognized at the throne and would always assure the answer. Prayer now depends upon the right use of His name. That signature attached makes the prayer pass in the commerce of heaven.

There are three great ideas associated with the words "in My name". We pray in the name of Christ (1) when we rely on the redemption that He has wrought for us; (2) when we have the spirit of Christ and seek the things which He seeks; and (3) when we are in vital union with Him.

1. It was in the power of the ritual sacrifice that the high priest in Israel passed through the veil on the day of atonement. It is in the power of the accepted offering of the Lamb of Divine

[1] R. H. Hutton, *Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought*, 246.

appointment that we are privileged to come into the presence of God. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water; let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised." Not only has the Son of God bridged the chasm of nature by becoming Son of man, but as Son of man, representative of our common humanity, He takes upon Him the awful burden of human guilt, gathers it about His holy life, feels the sting of it as none but a sinless soul could feel it. If any one suggests a difficulty about this, let him think of Moses in the idolatrous camp of Israel, the one man entirely innocent being the one man of all the multitude who felt the guilt to be intolerable. So it was that the Son of God felt the guilt of our sins as none but His sinless soul could feel it. What a Nessus' shirt He wears that day, as He accepts sin's righteous condemnation, welcomes the sentence of God's righteous law upon it, dies, the Just for the unjust, takes away the sin of the world to bury it in His grave, and rises victorious over sin and death, having exchanged the lamentable cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" for the glad utterance, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit". All this He does as Son of man, as representing us if we will have Him, as the forerunner of all who will follow Him, entering into the presence of God for us, and inviting us to enter into the presence of God with Him by the way He has opened for us: "through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father". The enmity is gone. We are "reconciled to God by the death of his Son".

¶ Suppose that I, a sinner, be walking along yon golden street, passing by one angel after another. I can hear them say as I pass through their ranks, "A sinner! a crimson sinner!" Should my feet totter? Should my eye grow dim? No; I can say to them, "Yes, a sinner, a crimson sinner, but a sinner brought near by a forsaken Saviour, and now a sinner who has boldness to enter into the Holies through the blood of Jesus".[1]

[1] A. A. Bonar, *Heavenly Springs*, 176.

¶ I recall distinctly a certain section of this country where I was for awhile, and very rarely did I hear Jesus' name used in prayer. I heard men that I knew must be good men praying in church, in prayer-meeting and elsewhere with no mention of Jesus. Let us distinctly bear in mind that we have no standing with God except through Jesus. If the keenest lawyer of London, who knew much of American law, and of Illinois statute, and of Chicago ordinance—suppose such a one were to come here, could he plead a case in your court-house? You know he could not. He would have no legal standing here. Now you and I have no standing at yonder bar. We are disbarred through sin. Only as we come through One who has recognized standing there can we come.[1]

¶ No one truly prays who does not pray in the freedom of Christ's life, and work, and death. The measure of faith in His merits and sacrifice will be found to be the measure of prayer in the case of any individual or of any Church. The two great branches of our Lord's family differ so widely as to all which constitutes the government and administration of Divine grace, that any communion between them, except that of charity, is little short of an intellectual impossibility. But the Catholic and the Protestant are at one as regards redemption. Each agrees as to the facts of man's fall, and sin, and need. Each for his restoration relies upon the supernatural help which Christ's work for man obtained; therefore, though these two may misunderstand and misrepresent the other, they are none the less brethren.

See,
Their speech is one, their witnesses agree.

Each believes, each loves, each prays, and that from the very depth and ground of the heart. And, as regards any individual member of either communion, we shall find that it is the sight of the cross, and of all the tremendous associations that are bound up with it—the sense of guilt, of condemnation, of deliverance, of infinite loss, and everlasting gain,—that brings, that *binds* the soul to prayer.[2]

2. To pray in the name of Christ is to pray in His spirit, according to His mind. It means that we pray for such things as will promote Christ's Kingdom. When we do anything in another's name it is for him we do it. When we take possession

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, 156.
[2] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 124.

of a property, of a legacy in the name of some society, it is not for our own private advantage but for the society we take possession. Yet how constantly do we overlook this obvious condition of acceptable prayer! To pray in Christ's name is to seek what He seeks, to ask aid in promoting what He has at heart. To come in Christ's name and plead selfish and worldly aims is absurd. To pray in Christ's name is to pray in the spirit in which He Himself prayed and for objects He desires. When we measure our prayers by this rule we cease to wonder that so few seem to be answered. Is God to answer prayers that positively lead men away from Him? Is He to build them up in the presumption that happiness can be found in the pursuit of selfish objects and worldly comfort? It is when a man stands detached from worldly hopes and finding all in Christ, so clearly apprehending the sweep and benignity of Christ's will as to see that it comprehends all good to man, and that life can serve no purpose if it do not help to fulfil that will—it is then a man prays with assurance and finds his prayer answered.

Such prayer involves intelligent, loving, enthusiastic co-operation with His purpose: growing interest in all the higher communications of His truth; perseverance in sustaining the character and the work begun by His grace, so that the result of both may continue from generation to generation, when our own service, necessarily incomplete, is ended here; joy in seeing each measure of success, wheresoever it be, granted to that work. It was to His friends and neighbours that the Good Shepherd said, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost". Comprehension, then, of the purpose of Christ, a spiritual imagination large enough to embrace a portion, at least, of His plans, a growth of love able to sympathize, a ready will to co-operate must accompany prayer in His name.

¶ There is a law pertaining to human nature which demands that there should be active co-operation on our part before the beneficent purposes of God can be fulfilled. Jesus taught us to pray "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven". He knew that it was possible for the Divine will to remain undone, or even to be frustrated by the indifference or rebellion of man. As we grow and mature, God calls us increasingly to enter into His life and share His plans and operations. He takes us into His counsels, imparts to us His thoughts, and asks us to become His agents. There are two ways in which He does this. Sometimes

there comes to us, all unsought, a revelation of His mind and will regarding something He would have us desire or do. To the eye of faith the vision is clear. The Transcendent God has for a moment lifted the overhanging veil of mystery and made His purpose plain. But only on rare occasions does He thus reveal Himself, else the human faculty of seeing would atrophy without its appropriate exercise. His ordinary means of guiding our thoughts and acts is by His indwelling. He is the Immanent God, and He would have us learn more and more to see Him in ourselves—to take our own thoughts, desires, aims, as the offspring of His, confident that He will not betray the trusting heart in which both by nature and by grace He dwells.[1]

¶ "Do not try planning and praying and then planning again; it is not honouring to God," wrote General Gordon. And it would be hard to measure how much of the extraordinary power of his life was due to this—that there was no reserve in his committal of himself to God; that he lived with an undivided trust; that he had marked and judged and dealt with the temptation to half-heartedness in prayer.[2]

3. But prayer in Christ's name also implies union with Christ and identification of interests. This it is that the Saviour Himself emphasizes when He says: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John xv. 7). Of this, too, the Apostle John says: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1 John iii. 21-24).

What is it to abide in Christ? That is the first question in settling the qualities of him who can hope to pray successfully. The phrase becomes familiar to us in the New Testament; and indeed we might find a parallel that would explain it to us in several of the different kinds of relation that exist between human

[1] L. Swetenham, *Conquering Prayer*, 139. [2] Francis Paget.

beings. For instance, we should probably all understand what was meant if it were said of a young and dutiful child that he abode or lived in his parents. The child's earliest years are so completely hidden behind the parents' life that you look upon him not altogether as a separate individuality, but rather as almost a part of the same organism, one expression of the parents' nature; so that, just as the arm, the tongue, the eye, are several media for the expression of the parents' will, in the same way, though in a higher degree, the child is another limb of the parental life and utterance of the parental nature. The law owns this, and reaches the child only through the parent. We all expect children's opinions on matters of religion, of politics, of taste, to be echoes of their parents'. The father acts and thinks for the child. The child acts and thinks in the father. Thus, until the time when the gradual departure takes place, the child's home is not merely in his father's house, but in his father's character—he abides in him. Or take another case: the army and the common soldier "abide in" the general. The army does what its general does. As an army, it has no thought or action out of him. It moves when he moves, stops moving when he stops moving. We say the general has gone here and there, and we mean the army has gone. It lays aside all faculty of decision, or rather contributes it all to him, and he with the combined responsibility of the great multitude upon him goes his way, carrying their life in his. That is perhaps the most complete and absolute identification of two lives that it is possible to conceive of.

¶ We all know with what confidence the clerk of a business house goes to a bank with a draft "in the name" of his firm. If he were to present it in his own name, that would be a very different affair. The demand made on behalf of the firm is instantly honoured. We can see that there is all the difference in this instance between acting in a private and acting in a public capacity. To ask as belonging to a business corporation for the purposes of that corporation is one thing. To ask as a private individual, with merely personal ends in view, is quite another thing. Shall we be wrong if we say that Christ meant us to understand that whatever we ask as connected with Him, as belonging to Him, as members of the Body which is identified with Him, and which has the right to use His name, would be given to us? Some one has said that "to ask in Christ's name is to ask

with Christ's authority for what He would ask". We are not likely to arrive at a better definition than that.[1]

(1) Such a use of the name of a person may be in virtue of a *legal union*. A merchant leaving his home and business gives his chief clerk a general power, by which he can draw thousands of pounds in the merchant's name. The clerk does this, not for himself, but only in the interests of the business. It is because the merchant knows and trusts him as wholly devoted to his interests and business that he dares put his name and property at his command. When the Lord Jesus went to heaven, He left His work, the management of His kingdom on earth, in the hands of His servants. He could not do otherwise than give them also His name to draw all the supplies they needed for the due conduct of His business. And they have the spiritual power to avail themselves of the name of Jesus just to the extent to which they yield themselves to live only for the interests and the work of the Master. The use of the name always supposes the surrender of our interests to Him whom we represent.

(2) Or such a use of the name may be in virtue of a *life union*. In the case of the merchant and his clerk, the union is temporary. But we know how oneness of life on earth gives oneness of name: a child has the father's name because he has his life. And often the child of a good father has been honoured or helped by others for the sake of the name he bore. But this would not last long if it were found that it was only a name and that the father's character was wanting. The name and the character or spirit must be in harmony. When such is the case, the child will have a double claim on the father's friends; the character secures and increases the love and esteem rendered first for the name's sake. So it is with Jesus and the believer: we are one, we have one life, one Spirit with Him; for this reason we may come in His name. Our power in using that name, whether with God, or men, or devils, depends on the measure of our spiritual life-union. The use of the Name rests on the unity of life; the name and the Spirit of Jesus are one.

(3) Or the union that empowers to the use of the name may be the *union of love*. When a bride becomes united to the

[1] A. W. Robinson, *The Voice of Joy and Health*, 68.

bridegroom, she gives up her own name, to be called by his, and has now the full right to use it. She purchases in his name, and that name is not refused. And this is done because the bridegroom has chosen her for himself, counting on her to care for his interests; they are now one. And so the Heavenly Bridegroom could do nothing less; having loved us and made us one with Himself, what could He do but give those who bear His name the right to present it before the Father, or to come with it to Himself for all they need? And there is no one who gives himself really to live in the name of Jesus who does not receive in ever-increasing measure the spiritual capacity to ask and receive in that name what he will. The bearing of the name of another supposes my having given up my own, and with it my own independent life; but then, as surely, my possession of all there is in the name I have taken instead of my own.

¶ "Prayer in the name of Christ," though essentially a mystical phrase, also contains a surface meaning which is very valuable to those who grasp and apply it. And there are many who in their use of the words attach this very definite meaning to them. They are aware that name in olden days stood for character. Hence prayer in the name of Christ signifies to them prayer in the name or *character* of Christ involving the elimination from their supplications of all that is foreign to His nature, and the inclusion of all those virtues and ideals He taught and exemplified—in a word, it is prayer in the holy and obedient spirit of Jesus. Any demand upon life thus based upon the name or character of Jesus cannot fail to be according to the will of God—thereby fulfilling one of the conditions laid down for effectual prayer. The more Jesus becomes our standard and inspiration in prayer the more confident we may be of a favourable hearing. This is surely what He meant by the words, "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you".[1]

¶ To attain that holy abiding in which there is such a perfect community of life with our true Vine that it is as impossible for us to ask amiss as for the branch of the fig-tree to put forth the buds and flowers of the thorn is, as we all confess, to reach the very highest ideal of discipleship. And yet on nothing short of this perfectness of union with our Lord has He predicated an unrestricted access to the treasuries of Divine blessing. The same

[1] L. Swetenham, *Conquering Prayer*, 169.

condition is affixed to each of the highest and most longed-for attainments of the Christian life—sinlessness, fruitfulness, and prevalence in prayer; namely, "*If ye abide in me*".[1]

III.

In the Power of the Spirit.

Prayer offered in the name of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit in prayer are so closely linked, one with the other, that the former truth involves the latter. The sacred humanity of the Saviour received in the Incarnation itself the anointing of the Holy Ghost; at the Baptism there was a further anointing; once again, at His Ascension, the anointing was repeated. The same Spirit by which the manhood of the incarnate Lord has been moulded into what it is passes into His members; every part of their redeemed nature is pervaded by His presence; through His strength enabling their wills to respond to the Divine will, through His illumination developing their spiritual insight, through His gift of love enkindling their affections, they realize their true selves as God ever intended them to be. The result is that Christ Himself is revealed and formed within them. To glorify the Son who sends Him is the Spirit's loftiest task. In effecting the vital union of the glorified Head with the members of His Body, of the branches in the Vine and the Vine in the branches, that function of the Holy Ghost in man is accomplished.

To understand how the coming of the Holy Spirit was indeed to commence a new epoch in the prayer-world, we must remember who He is, what His work, and what the significance of His not being given until Jesus was glorified. It is in the Spirit that God exists, for He is Spirit. It is in the Spirit that the Son was begotten of the Father; it is in the fellowship of the Spirit that the Father and Son are one. The eternal, never-ceasing giving to the Son, which is the Father's prerogative, and the eternal asking and receiving, which is the Son's right and blessedness—it is through the Spirit that this communion of life and love is maintained. It has been so from all eternity. It is so specially now, when the Son as Mediator ever liveth to pray. The great work which Jesus began on earth, of reconciling in His

[1] A. J. Gordon, *In Christ*, 137.

own body God and man, He carries on in heaven. To accomplish this He took up into His person the conflict between God's righteousness and our sin. On the cross He once for all ended the struggle in His own body. And then He ascended to heaven, that thence He might in each member of His body carry out the deliverance and manifest the victory He had obtained. It is to do this that He ever liveth to pray; in His unceasing intercession He places Himself in living fellowship with the unceasing prayer of His redeemed ones. Or rather, it is His unceasing intercession which shows itself in their prayers, and gives them a power they never had before. And He does this through the Holy Spirit.

1. The Spirit assures us of the nearness and power of Christ Himself. It was this that Jesus taught His disciples on that same night when He told them that those who had seen Him had seen the Father. Much was said during those sacred hours of the Spirit who was to come when Jesus Himself should be seen no more. Why did He speak thus of that Spirit? It is reasonable to think that it was, in the main, a practical purpose which He had in view. He was about to leave His disciples, and they were miserable at the thought of losing Him. They would be like orphans in a desolate world if He were gone. The sun would have vanished out of their sky. And, reading their thoughts, He tried to reassure them. They were not to be troubled or afraid. It would not be as they were fearing. For, in the first place, if He were leaving them, it was only that He might make ready for them in a House in which there would be ample room for them as well as for Him. And, next, they were to understand that, though He might leave them for a little while, He would come again in another Form, and dwell with them, and within them, in fellowship yet dearer and more intimate than anything they had known in the happy days which now were coming to an end. The Spirit who was of Himself, and who was Himself, should be their abiding Guest. Unseen by any mortal eye, He yet would ever be by their side and nearer than by their side, a Helper and a Comforter whose home should be in the most secret chamber of their being. If any man would be obedient, Jesus and the Father would come, and would take up their abode with that man. Why should they be disconsolate? They would

never be left alone. The Father would be with them. The Son would be with them, who, as their Human Friend and Lord, had interpreted the Father. Father and Son would be with them in the presence of that Spirit who could never be separated from either.

The presence then promised, now realized through the Spirit, is the Emmanuel-presence, Divine and human. It is the presence that, in ways appropriate to each, gives its life to the word, to the sacraments, to prayer in public and private, to the ministry in the Church. It is the presence that constitutes the Christian standing before God, and forms the character into correspondence with "the mind of Christ," which is the condition of asking in His name. In the teaching of St. Paul, those "in whom the Spirit of God dwells" are those "in whom Christ is"; those who are in Christ Jesus, and are owned as His, are those who have "the Spirit of Christ". Such was the Apostle's conviction as, under the guidance of the Paraclete, he developed and applied the Lord's own revelation in passages saturated with inspiration. The presence of the assisting Spirit, the presence also of "Christ Jesus . . . who maketh intercession for us," coincident and inseparable—this is the basis of teaching instinct with energy, hope, and stability respecting the action of the Holy Spirit in prayer.

Lord, I have shut my door!
Come Thou and visit me; I am alone!
Come, as when doors were shut, Thou cam'st of yore,
And visitedst Thine own.
My Lord, I kneel with reverent love and fear,
For Thou art here.

2. The Spirit gives us confidence in our approach, by witnessing to our sonship. Twice in St. Paul's Epistles there is a remarkable reference to Him in the matter of prayer. "Ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. viii. 15). "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. iv. 6). In that name our Saviour offered His greatest prayer to the Father, accompanied by the entire surrender and sacrifice of His life and love. The Holy Spirit is given for the express purpose of teaching us,

from the very beginning of our Christian life onward, to utter that word in childlike trust and surrender. In one of these passages we read, "We cry"; in the other, "He cries". What a wonderful blending of the Divine and the human co-operation in prayer. What a proof that God has done His utmost to make prayer as natural and effectual as though it were the cry of a child to an earthly Father, as He says, "Abba, Father".

¶ *Abba*, the Syrian vocative for *father*, was a word familiar to the lips of Jesus. No one had hitherto approached God as He did. His utterance of this word, expressing the attitude of His life of prayer and breathing the whole spirit of His religion, profoundly affected His disciples. So that the *Abba* of Jesus became a watchword of His Church, being the prayer name of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Gentile believers pronounced it, conscious that in doing so they were joined in spirit to the Lord who said, "My Father, and your Father!" Greek-speaking Christians supplemented it by their own equivalent, as we by the English *Father*. This precious vocable is carried down the ages and round the whole world in the mother-tongue of Jesus, a memorial of the hour when through Him men learned to call God *Father*.[1]

3. This sense of sonship is, then, a sense of oneness with the other members of the Body of Christ. In the light of the common prayer, "Abba, Father," we can hardly doubt that it was in acts of earnest, corporate worship that this intercession of the Spirit made itself felt in the Apostolic age. Such, for instance, was that act of worship described in the Acts of the Apostles, consequent on the return of St. Peter and St. John from their examination before the Council, followed by a renewed manifestation of Christian self-sacrifice and Christian energy; such also that solemn "ministration to the Lord," during which the Holy Ghost made known His will: "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them"; and then, after a new and special act of fasting and prayer, He bade the officers of the Church send them on their mission. Probably if attendance at our own public worship were characterized by greater earnestness, more expectancy, a deeper desire to set forth the Divine glory, it would be in the great congregation, chiefly at the Holy

[1] G. G. Findlay, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 253.

Communion, though at other acts of corporate praise, thanksgiving, and intercession also, that the presence of the interceding Spirit would be realized. Into prayer new energy and interest would be infused; into the worshippers there would enter a desire so to consecrate their lives that the Kingdom of God might be extended, and the lofty hope of the Second Advent might be fulfilled.

¶ A "belief in the Holy Catholic Church" should react on our religious life in several beneficial ways. It should give us a lively sense of gratitude to our predecessors in the Christian faith and a sense of the unbroken continuity of the Christian life in all ages. We need to remember how continuous has been the spiritual life in the Church, and how a long-suffering God has borne with the faults and superstitions which in every age have adhered to its organization. The more vivid and the farther-reaching is our impression of the patience of the wooing Spirit of God, the deeper will be our personal sense of obligation, the more truly "evangelical" our spirit. For it is just the sense of infinite debt to the Supreme, "the habit of grace," it is just this that is the dominant note in the Christian life everywhere: the universal Church of Jesus is one vast Brotherhood of Infinite Obligation. The thought of the vastness, variety, duration, and essential unity of the common life to which we belong if we be members of Christ's Body, the Church, should impose upon us a sense of responsibility as having our place in the inheriting and transmission of that common life. We come into the Christian life, not as though we were the first that ever burst into the sea of Christian truth and feeling, but as the successors, heirs, and debtors of a vast company who represent the purest, sanest, and most serviceable element in the life of humanity. Every one of us who is baptized into the spirit of Jesus is the successor of apostles, confessors, martyrs, monks, evangelists, reformers, who have mediated the Christian view-point and temper—and, better still, of the great anonymous crowd of holy men who have lived and prayed, and live and pray now, in heaven, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ.[1]

4. The Spirit intercedes with us, transfiguring our prayer. How inestimable is the support of the revelation that the interceding Spirit, to whom as God the mind of the Godhead is known, takes up our prayers, in themselves so unworthy, and so inadequate in every quality which prayer should possess, supplies their

[1] G. A. Johnston Ross, *The God We Trust*, 153.

deficiencies, inspires them with "comfort, life, and fire of love," and unites them with the intercession of the Mediator, who presents them to the Father. In gaining this supreme benefit, we find ourselves possessed of the secret of effectual prayer, and are on the way to be delivered from all perplexity and uncertainty in our supplications, for the Holy Spirit is our Advocate and Intercessor within, even as Christ is our Intercessor before the throne of God; and if He inspires our prayers, we may in offering them be freed from all misgivings as to the Divine will. St. Paul's language is very clear and very striking on this point: "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God". If, therefore, we are filled, as we may be, and as God intends us to be, with the Holy Ghost, we may expect such Divine guidance in our prayers as shall render their answer certain. For, as the Apostle puts the matter in another place, "Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God."

¶ You have intimated your doubt of what spirit it is said that he "maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered". Let us then refer to what has gone before, that the passage may make plain what we are seeking. Likewise, it is said "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities". Does it not seem to you that this is the Holy Spirit, for He is our Helper, as He to whom it is said, "Thou hast been my succour, leave me not neither forsake me, O God of my salvation!" For what other Spirit could teach Paul how to pray? The Spirit of Christ, like Christ Himself, teaches His disciples to pray, for who could teach us, after Christ, but His Spirit, whom He sent to teach us, and to direct our prayers, "for we pray with the Spirit and we pray with the understanding also". That the understanding may pray well, the Spirit goes before and "leads it forth into the right way," so as to prevent carnal things, or what either falls below or exceeds its strength, from secretly stealing over it.

"For the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." It is written also, Seek great things, and small things shall be added unto you; seek heavenly things, and earthly things shall be added unto you.[1]

¶ The interceding Spirit is in Himself perfectly conscious of God's mind and purpose, and God is perfectly conscious of His. He intercedes "according to God". This intercession is but a form of the perfect Divine life. But in the heart of the Church this desire of the Spirit can make itself felt only in groanings for the Divine manifestation which, like the aspirations which music suggests or expresses, are too deep to admit of articulate utterance. St. Paul, when he speaks of groanings which cannot be put into words, is perhaps thinking of the "tongues" in which the spiritual emotion of the first Christian churches found expression. And we should think of some earnest act of corporate Christian worship when, under the workings of the one Spirit, the strong desire after what is holiest and highest possesses men, and binds them together with a sense of longing for the Divine manifestation which could not be put into definite words.[2]

5. The Spirit regenerates our nature, and that in all its parts —understanding, feeling, imagination, will. And what our prayer can do depends always upon what we are. It is living in the name of Christ that is the secret of praying in the name of Christ; living in the Spirit that fits for praying in the Spirit. It is abiding in Christ that gives the right and power to ask what we will: the extent of the abiding is the exact measure of the power in prayer. It is the Spirit dwelling within us that prays, not in words and thoughts always, but in a breathing and a being deeper than utterance. Just so much as there is of Christ's Spirit in us, is there real prayer.

¶ It is as when the vessel nearing land flings its rope and finds that it holds. In prayer we know ourselves in contact with a higher realm of things, and our rope holds. Our answer is the thing we want, the best thing there is. Not words; for what are they? Not words, but what is so much better—the inflowing of peace, a sense of security, the feeling of a near Presence, often an ineffable happiness. Are there better things in this or any world than these? Prayer is the soul's contact with the realm

[1] S. Ambrose.

[2] Bishop Gore, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, i. 313.

to which it belongs. Throw your cable across to it, and you find that it holds. Throw your bridge across to it, and the treasures, the society, of that realm will begin to pour in. Nature in all her departments is full of answers, most of which we have not yet learned to decipher. But our highest nature, as it throws out its signals to the silent air—that, too, is answered back. The notes that come to us, faint and far off though they may seem, are from the realm of the real. Nature, so honest with us in all our lower questionings, will not turn traitor to us in this last and highest. The range of things through which she leads us are the outer courts of a temple. Her final secret is God.[1]

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-Day*, 252.

IX.

Personal Demands of Prayer.

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PERSONAL DEMANDS OF PRAYER.

WE have already spoken of what we have called the First Principles of Prayer—that prevailing prayer must be in accordance with the will of God, in the name of Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are now to deal with some of the less essential but still very important demands that are made upon us, if our prayer is to prevail. These are—Knowledge of God; Repentance; Faith, Hope, and Love; Importunity.

I.

KNOWLEDGE.

1. Prayer is founded upon knowledge. For prayer is speaking to God. And before we can speak to God, we must know God. How shall they call, an Apostle asks, on Him in whom they have not believed? Even the prayer of the heathen, so far as it is prayer, rests upon knowledge. If he speaks to an idol—if he asks aid of wood or stone, and stops there—then the nonentity of the object communicates itself to the worship: an idol is nothing in the world, and the prayer which treats it as an existence is itself nothing. But if the heathen man in any degree looks through the idol to a Being conceived of as distinct from it; if he so much as recognizes one of God's real attributes, say even power, and addresses himself to that; then, in the same proportion, the lie of his idolatry becomes tinged and tinctured with a truth, and the cry, "O Baal, hear us," may be the faint shadow and reflection of a better worship, because it also, even it, has this characteristic of the prayer we speak of, that it is founded (in some one point at least) upon knowledge. The man has an idea of God as a God of power. The prayer which knew nothing whatever of its object, or which called upon Him in no one respect as He is,

would lack the first principle of all prayer, that it must have a basis of knowledge.

Are not Christian prayers often destitute of this first condition? To how many might the remonstrance of God now be addressed, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself"; such in discernment, such in equity, such in veracity, or such in power! How many, even in prayer, never let God into their secrets; hope to elude His inspection, try to baffle His intuition! How many, even in prayer, expect of God a treatment neither just nor moral; ask of Him some compromise with evil, and a salvation not from but in their sins! How many, even in prayer, act the hypocrite and the dissembler, professing desires which they do not feel, and regrets and repentances which do not deceive even themselves! How many still expect to be heard for their much speaking, or to overbear the counsels of the Unchangeable by the vehemence of their importunity! All such prayers lack the requisite—the knowledge, the true knowledge, of Him to whom they are offered.

¶ Before we can pray to God in a worthy manner, we must distinguish between the earthly and the heavenly Father. For although we speak of Him as a Father, which implies also the idea of personality, we do not mean that He is subject to personal caprice, or that He favours some of His children more than others, or that He will alter His universal laws in order to avert some calamity from us. All experience is against this, and we should destroy religion if we set up faith against universal experience. For either we should dwell in a sort of fools' paradise, believing that our prayers had been answered when they had not been, because we had asked things which God could not grant (for they were at variance with the laws of the universe); or we should deny that there was a God altogether, because there was no such God as we had imagined. We must enlarge the horizon of our thoughts, and conceive of God once more as the infinite, the eternal Father, "with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning" either in the physical or in the moral world; He of whom Christ says, "Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing? and yet your heavenly Father careth for them," and "The very hairs of your head are all numbered"; and yet also the universal law, the mind or reason which contains all laws, as much above the world of which He is the Author as our souls are above our bodies; in whom all things live and move and have

their being; who is the perfection of all things, and yet distinct from them.[1]

¶ There are five everyday words I want to bring before you to suggest something of who God is. They are familiar words, in constant use. The first is the word *father*. "Father" stands for strength, loving strength. A father plans, and provides for, and protects his loved ones. All fathers are not good. How man can extract the meaning out of a fine word, and use the word without its meaning! If you will think of the finest father ever you knew that anybody ever had; think of him now. Then remember this, God is a father, only He is so much finer a father than the finest father you ever knew of. And His will for your *life*—I am not talking about heaven, and our souls just now, though that is in it too—His will for your life down here these days is a father's will for the one most dearly loved.

The second word is a finer word. Because woman is finer than man, and was made, and meant to be, this second word is finer than the first. I mean the word *mother*. If 'father" stands for strength, "mother" stands for love—great, patient, tender, fine-fibred, enduring love. What would she not do for her loved one! Why, not unlikely she went down into the valley of the shadow that that life might come; and did it gladly with the love-light shining out of her eyes. Yes, and would do it again, that the life may remain if need be. That is a mother. You think of the finest mother ever you knew. And the suggestion brings the most hallowed memories to my own heart. Then remember this: God is a mother, only He is so much finer a mother than the finest mother you ever knew. The references in Scripture to God as a mother are numerous. "Under his wings" is a mother figure. The mother-bird gathers her brood up under her wings to feel the heat of her body, and for protection. The word "mother" is not used for God in the Bible. I think it is because with God "father" includes "mother". It takes more of the human to tell the story than of the Divine. With God, all the strength of the father and all the fine love of the mother are combined in that word "father". And His will for us is a mother's will, a wise loving mother's will for the darling of her heart.

The third word is *friend*. I do not mean to use it in the cheaper meaning. There is a certain kindliness of speech in which all acquaintances are called friends. Tupper says we call all men friends who are not known to be enemies. But I mean to use the word in its finer meaning. Here, a friend is one who

[1] B. Jowett, *Sermons on Faith and Doctrine*, 252.

loves you for your sake only, and steadfastly loves without regard to any return, even a return-love. The English have a saying that you may fill a church with your acquaintances, and not fill the pulpit seats with your friends. If you may have in your life one or two real friends you are very wealthy. If you will think for a moment of the very best friend you ever knew anybody ot have. Then remember this: God is a friend. Only He is ever so much better a friend than the best friend you ever knew of. And the plan He has thought out for your life is such a one as that word would suggest.

The fourth word, I almost hesitate to use. The hesitancy is because the word and its relationship are spoken of lightly, frivolously, so much, even in good circles. I mean that rare fine word *lover*. Where two have met, and acquaintance has deepened into friendship, and that in turn into the holiest emotion, the highest friendship. What would he not do for her! She becomes the new human centre of his life. In a good sense he worships the ground she treads upon. And she—she will leave wealth for poverty if only so she may be with him in the coming days. She will leave home and friends, and go to the ends of the earth if his service calls him there. You think of the finest lover, man or woman, you ever knew anybody to have. Then remember this, and let me say it in soft, reverent tones, God is a lover—shall I say in yet more reverent voice, a sweetheart-lover. Only He is so much finer a lover than the finest lover you ever knew of. And His will, His plan for your life and mine—it hushes my heart to say it—is a lover's plan for his only loved one.

The fifth word is this fourth word a degree finer spun, a stage farther on, and higher up, the word *husband*. This is the word on the man side for the most hallowed relationship of earth. This is the lover relationship in its perfection stage. With men "husband" is not always a finer word than "lover". The more's pity. How man does cheapen God's plan of things; leaves out the kernel, and keeps only an empty shell sometimes. In God's thought a husband is a lover *plus*. He is all that the finest lover is, and more; more tender, more eager, more thoughtful. Two lives are joined, and begin living one life. Two wills, yet one. Two persons, yet one purpose. Duality in unity. Will you call to mind for a moment the best husband you ever knew any woman to have? Then remember this, that God is a husband; only He is an infinitely more thoughtful husband than any you ever knew. And His will for your life is a husband's will for his life's friend and companion.

Now, please, do not *you* take one of these words, and say, "I like that"; and *you* another and say, "That conception of God appeals to me," and *you* another. How we do whittle God down to our narrow conceptions! You must take all five words, and think the finest meaning into each, and then put them all together, to get a close up idea of God. He is all that, *and more*.[1]

2. One great defect in the common practice of prayer is that we do not sufficiently realize *the personal character* of the God whom we are addressing. Our prayer too often seems as if we had forgotten that we are persons praying to another Person. In some this arises from the common mode of talk in our day, which prefers to look on God as the one force pervading the universe, the great source of law, the essence and substance of all that is, rather than as a Person to whom love, and honour, and reverence are due. To such minds prayer is an act by which we put ourselves in harmony with universal law, or are filled with a sense of the greatness of the universe; it is not a petition addressed to Him "who heareth the prayer" and to whom "all flesh shall come". This tendency, which in its extreme form is mere paganism or pantheism, subtly affects those who would be horrified to hear that they were not devout Christians; it makes their prayers less confiding, less loving, less reverent.

(1) The first essential, then, when we come to pray, is loving confidence, trust in Him to whom we pray, certainty that it is right for us to ask, and that in some way, unguessed perhaps by us, He will bring it to pass. If we would rightly conceive of God and of our relations to Him, we must take away from the human relation of parent and child all that is imperfect, temporary, limited; we must think of a child devoid of fear, perfectly straightforward, with complete confidence in his father's love and power; we must think of a Father in whom is no possible variation in His wish to hear His children, who knows no weariness, no moments of indifference, whom no engrossing cares can hinder from listening with all-embracing love to the imperfect utterance of those whom He has made. Such is the God to whom we pray; such is the attitude which he means us to adopt towards Him.

[1] S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, 177.

¶ Everything turns to me on the one foundation-fact that God is love—not only love toward all, but love toward me personally, F. W. C.! Then with that in mind I see that this Lover of my soul directs me to pray for all things, and it is abundantly clear that answered prayer encourages faith and personal relations in a way which broad principles only cannot effect. As the *Spectator* put it many years ago, much that would be positively bad for us if given without prayer is good if sent in answer. We feel (do we not?) that all the evil of the world springs from mistrust of God. Nothing can recover us from this state of alienated unrest like answered prayer. Simon the Sorcerer wanted Holy-Ghost power, without asking God for it, to traffic on his own separate account. It would have been evil had he got it thus for money and not in answer to prayer. But no gift rivals the indwelling of the Giver Himself, and this can, as a rule, only be had in answer to prayer of a most earnest sort.[1]

(2) But this very attitude of mind, this perfect trust and certainty, involves another element of the child-like relation to the Father, the element of profound reverence. It is in most cases the great fault in our habits of prayer that they are not reverent. We do not realize our relation to God, we do not approach Him with "reverence and godly fear," we treat Him in our prayers, both private and public, as we should not venture to treat an earthly superior, an earthly father; we make our petitions with a carelessness which, in earthly things, would prove that they mattered very little to us.

¶ Neglect nothing which can produce reverence. Pass not at once from the things of this world to prayer, but collect thyself. Think what thou art, what God is; thyself a child, and God thy Father; but also thyself dust and ashes, God a consuming fire, before whom angels hide their faces; thyself unholy, God holy; thyself a sinner, God thy Judge. And to this it will help, before you first pray, reverently to repeat your Belief, as confessing before God all He has wrought for you, and His own Majesty; or as they did of old, to think of the last four things, Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell; what thou hopest, everlasting life; what thou fearest, unceasing misery; what thou needest, God's pardoning, preventing, assisting, perfecting grace, to save thee from the one, and along a strait and narrow path to guide thee to the other; nay further yet, God's help, that thou mayest fear the one

[1] F. W. Crossley, in *Life* by J. Rendel Harris, 171.

and hope for the other; for the very power to dread hell, or to hope for Heaven, is itself a great gift of God.[1]

II.

Repentance.

Another condition of success in prayer is repentance. The word is used in its full meaning of both sorrow for sin and turning from it. Every one who refuses to renounce his wrath, arrogance, and greed, his intemperance, his sensuality, certainly does well not to pray; for prayer is then a lie, and only serves to harden the heart still more. How can he truthfully say, "Hallowed be thy name," while he will not let God's name be hallowed in his heart and life? How can he pray aright for the forgiveness of sins, with his secret purpose to retain his sins, with an implacable mind, with hatred and strife? How can he pray not to be tempted, when he gladly goes after temptation directly it comes? How can he pray to be saved from the power of the evil one, while surrendering himself to the power of the Evil One, and letting it rule over him? The door of prayer opens only to the earnest will that yields to the leading of the Holy Spirit in inclination and life. It may happen that a man who has been accustomed to pray perseveres in the custom after secretly purposing to indulge some evil passion that has dominion over him. But such prayer is an abomination to the Lord. No sin is so great that it should hinder prayer, if a man but sincerely renounces his sin; but no sin is so small as not to turn prayer itself into sin, if there is not the disposition to resist and overcome it. It is the bent of our will, our disposition, that renders prayer either pleasing or displeasing to God. Though a man sin seven times, nay, seventy times seven, but as often without secret hypocrisy turns to God and implores power and strength at last to gain the victory, from such prayer God will of a truth not turn away His ear. The hour will come when the penitent suppliant shall be able to thank God for victory.

1. Without obedience there can never be communion. How should there be? In the first place there can be no vision, no

[1] E. B. Pusey, *Occasional Sermons*, 134.

deep sense of God, without that fidelity to conscience in which obedience to Heaven consists. The pure in heart see God. And the pure in heart are those who seek, in all sincerity and singleness of mind, to do their duty hour by hour. They are the people to whom God becomes a Reality, a Being who lives and reigns, and who can be spoken to. We need not stay to inquire why this should be so. The theme is a tempting one, but it is enough to say here that human experience has abundantly proved that it is so. Men have found out that things which are hidden from the keen eyes and persistent search of the philosophic mind are revealed to the consecrated spirit.

¶ "Teach me to do thy will" (Ps. cxliii. 10). That is a very simple prayer, but it is one of the deepest and most comprehensive of prayers, for it embraces the whole round of obedience from first to last, in small things and great alike, in the inner as well as in the outer life—that universal obedience which Paul calls "standing perfect in all the will of God".

Matthew Henry sums up the whole matter of obedience in a few words, when he says, "To obey God's commandments is to obey them universally, without dividing them; sincerely, without evading them; cheerfully, without disputing them; and continually, without declining from them". And John Newton hit the truth exactly when he said, "If two angels were to receive at the same moment a commission from God, one to go down and rule earth's grandest empire, the other to go and sweep the streets of one of its meanest villages, it would be a matter of entire indifference to each which service fell to his lot, the post of ruler or the post of scavenger; for the joy of the angels lies only in obedience to God's will, and with equal joy they would lift a Lazarus in his rags to Abraham's bosom, or be a chariot of fire to carry an Elijah home".[1]

2. And, further, even if it were possible to have any vivid sense of God without the subjection of the human will to His, there could be no joy in prayer without it. Two cannot walk together unless they be agreed. Man may meet with God in solitary moments, but he cannot walk with Him in peace and liberty if he is conscious of any want of harmony between himself and his Companion. He cannot speak freely, he cannot ask for help, or for forgiveness, he cannot even confess his sin, if there is

[1] G. H. Knight, *Full Allegiance*, 123.

any sin unrepented of—in other words, if he is insisting, and knows it, on choosing his own way, in any particular, and not God's way. Inevitably there will be a sense of constraint, and a painful shrinking, and a desire to escape, so long as there is this secret rebellion of the heart, this resolve to hold back something which God claims, and is felt to have a right to claim. From this cause the prayers of men are often fatally hindered.

¶ That wilful sin while unrepented of must act as a barrier to prayer is implied in the wider sense of the word "devotion" itself. "Devotion" means a life given or devoted to God. "The devout" are those who offer themselves to God to serve Him, a definition which, if realized in life, would make an antithesis expressed too frequently between "the devout" and "the good" impossible.[1]

¶ A striking proverb current among the Hausa tribes of Northern Nigeria expresses an instinct which a religion not only so imperfect but, in subjects of grave importance, so false as the Mohammedan, cannot obliterate, because it is in the highest sense natural to man, as created in the image, after the likeness, of God Himself. "If there is no purity," they say, "there is no prayer; if there is no prayer, there is no drinking of the water of heaven."[2]

> When thine essence is purified from sin,
> Thy prayer then becomes a refreshment and delight;
> No barrier remains between;
> For the Knower and the Known have become one.[3]

III.

Faith, Hope, and Love.

"Faith, hope, and love." These are the three theological virtues. Through these virtues a deep relation between the soul and God is maintained. The true Christian love of God rests upon the basis of faith in His atoning love, and of hope in His promises. In true prayer all three virtues are necessarily exercised. For faith is the foundation of prayer—"Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive". Hope is the ladder by which faith ascends to love. And love is the cord

[1] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 186.
[2] *Ibid.*, 184.
[3] Shabistari, in Field's *Little Book of Eastern Wisdom*, 54.

which not only binds man to God, but draws him even now to Heaven. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

Prayer holds its fundamental place in the life of religion because it is in reality an attitude of the spirit rather than a formal exercise. It is the voice of trustful faith, which always and everywhere stays itself on God; it is the utterance of hope, seeking not the gifts of God, but His very Self; it is the expression of love which aims at complete union of heart and will with God. Thus prayer is one of the great forces tending to bring about the extension of the Divine Kingdom—that is, the sphere in which God's will is embraced and fulfilled. It is the supreme aid to holiness because it implies the Godward direction of the entire life, the dedication of the will to the fulfilment of the Divine purpose; and

He always wins who sides with God.

¶ One of Melanchthon's correspondents writes of Luther's praying: "I cannot enough admire the extraordinary cheerfulness, constancy, faith, and hope of the man in these trying and vexatious times. He constantly feeds these gracious affections by a very diligent study of the Word of God. Then not a day passes in which he does not employ in prayer at least three of his very best hours. Once I happened to hear him at prayer. Gracious God! What spirit and what faith is there in his expressions! He petitions God with as much reverence as if he were in the Divine presence, and yet with as firm a hope and confidence as he would address a father or a friend. 'I know,' said he, 'Thou art our Father and our God; and therefore I am sure Thou wilt bring to naught the persecutors of Thy children. For shouldest Thou fail to do this, Thine own cause, being connected with ours, would be endangered. It is entirely Thine own concern. We, by Thy providence, have been compelled to take a part. Thou therefore wilt be our defence.' Whilst I was listening to Luther praying in this manner, at a distance, my soul seemed on fire within me, to hear the man address God so like a friend, yet with so much gravity and reverence; and also to hear him, in the course of his prayer, insisting on the promises contained in the Psalms, as if he were sure his petitions would be granted."[1]

[1] E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer*, 37.

1. *Faith.*—Faith is the inevitable and essential accompaniment of all true prayer. Prayer must be based on Divine revelation and find its warrant in the promises and assurances of God's love and grace. This distinguishes Christian prayer from everything that goes by the name of prayer in heathen religions. Christian prayer is based on the Word of God. God encourages, commands, invites, welcomes prayer. The charter of prayer was given by our Lord at the outset of His ministry. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." This charter was confirmed again and again through His earthly ministry until it found its crown in His fullest, deepest teaching on prayer on the eve of the crucifixion, when He taught His disciples the meaning of prayer: "in my name". This warrant of prayer is accordingly met by our response of trust. Our faith accepts the assurance that prayer will be heard and answered, and pleads the fulfilment of Divine promises. Faith is thus the only possible response to the Divine revelation, and apart from our belief in God as the Hearer of prayer there could not be any real prayer or genuine blessing. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him". Herein lies the intimate and necessary connexion between the Word of God and prayer. The greater our knowledge of Scripture and the richer our experience of its preciousness, the fuller and deeper will be our prayers, until it shall become the simplest and most natural and most instructive experience of our life to live in the Divine Presence and rest on the Divine promises, and then to pour out our souls in the prayer of faith and believe to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

¶ In any natural action, say that of sowing a seed, the mental attitude of the sower signifies nothing; the seed will come up whether he expects it to do so or not; but in any act between two conscious intelligent beings, the mental attitude being obviously everything, the measure of faith is the measure of prayer. Faith makes the soul God's *creditor* (believer), in a literal sense it gives the soul a claim and hold upon Him.[1]

(1) The importance of the place which faith holds in spiritual

[1] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 131.

intercourse will be perceived the moment we recognize that faith is our act of appropriating spiritual truth and grace. God's bestowments are offered freely. We become powerful in proportion as we make them our own. Men of faith are men of capacity for receiving and using forces which are Divinely provided for all. The majority allow these to pass unappropriated. The elect minority, availing themselves of Divine potency, act for God, or rather allow Him to act through them, in extraordinary ways.

(2) This brings us to the point where we see faith as a force. Because it makes a man receptive of God it makes him conqueror over everything alien to God. The human becomes the medium of the Divine. When eternal power operates through a man he is no longer a loose particle on the surface of things, but becomes a part of the universe, so built into it that he stands with God and for God with a power not his own. He becomes as stable as the throne which God has erected within him. He is led to the stake. Fire cannot melt the forces which make him immovable. Does he encounter princes and potentates? Unblanched he stands before kings, or meets the rage of tyrants, invincible through a power which has no other explanation. Human frailty becomes an exhibition of Divine stability. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."

¶ After concluding my last service about ten o'clock that night, a poor man asked me to go and pray with his wife, saying that she was dying. I readily agreed, and on the way to his house asked him why he had not sent for the priest, as his accent told me he was an Irishman. He had done so, he said, but the priest refused to come without a payment of eighteen pence, which the man did not possess, as the family was starving. Immediately it occurred to my mind that all the money I had in the world was a solitary half-crown, and that it was in one coin; moreover, that while the basin of water-gruel I usually took for supper was awaiting me, and there was sufficient in the house for breakfast in the morning, I certainly had nothing for dinner on the coming day.

Somehow or other there was at once a stoppage in the flow of joy in my heart. But instead of reproving myself I began to reprove the poor man, telling him that it was very wrong to have

allowed matters to get into such a state as he described, and that he ought to have applied to the relieving officer. His answer was that he had done so, and was told to come at eleven o'clock the next morning, but that he feared his wife might not live through the night.

"Ah," thought I, "if only I had two shillings and a sixpence instead of this half-crown, how gladly would I give these poor people a shilling!" But to part with the half-crown was far from my thoughts. I little dreamed that the truth of the matter simply was that I could trust God plus one and sixpence, but was not prepared to trust Him only, without any money at all in my pocket.

My conductor led me into a court, down which I followed him with some degree of nervousness. I had found myself there before, and at my last visit had been roughly handled. My tracts had been torn to pieces and such a warning given me not to come again that I felt more than a little concerned. Still, it was the path of duty, and I followed on. Up a miserable flight of stairs into a wretched room he led me; and oh, what a sight there presented itself! Four or five children stood about, their sunken cheeks and temples all telling unmistakably the story of slow starvation, and lying on a wretched pallet was a poor, exhausted mother, with a tiny infant thirty-six hours old moaning rather than crying at her side, for it too seemed spent and failing.

"Ah!" thought I, "if I had two shillings and a sixpence, instead of half a crown, how gladly should they have one and sixpence of it." But still a wretched unbelief prevented me from obeying the impulse to relieve their distress at the cost of all I possessed.

It will scarcely seem strange that I was unable to say much to comfort these poor people. I needed comfort myself. I began to tell them, however, that they must not be cast down; that though their circumstances were very distressing there was a kind and loving Father in heaven. But something within me cried, "You hypocrite! telling these unconverted people about a kind and loving Father in heaven, and not prepared yourself to trust Him without half a crown."

I was nearly choked. How gladly would I have compromised with conscience, if I had had a florin and a sixpence! I would have given the florin thankfully and kept the rest. But I was not yet prepared to trust in God alone, without the sixpence.

To talk was impossible under these circumstances, yet strange to say I thought I should have no difficulty in praying. Prayer

was a delightful occupation in those days. Time thus spent never seemed wearisome and I knew no lack of words. I seemed to think that all I should have to do would be to kneel down and pray, and that relief would come to them and to myself together.

"You asked me to come and pray with your wife," I said to the man, "let us pray." And I knelt down.

But no sooner had I opened my lips with "Our Father who art in heaven" than conscience said within, "Dare you mock God? Dare you kneel down and call Him Father with that half-crown in your pocket?"

Such a time of conflict then came upon me as I have never experienced before or since. How I got through that form of prayer I know not, and whether the words uttered were connected or disconnected I cannot tell. But I arose from my knees in great distress of mind.

The poor father turned to me and said, "You see what a terrible state we are in, sir. If you can help us, for God's sake do!"

At that moment the word flashed into my mind, "Give to him that asketh of thee". And in the word of a King there is power.

I put my hand into my pocket and slowly drawing out the half-crown, gave it to the man, telling him that it might seem a small matter for me to relieve them, seeing that I was comparatively well off, but that in parting with that coin I was giving him my all; what I had been trying to tell them was indeed true—*God* really was a *Father* and might be trusted. The joy all came back in full floodtide to my heart. I could say anything and feel it then, and the hindrance to blessing was gone—gone, I trust, for ever.

Not only was the poor woman's life saved; but my life, as I fully realized, had been saved too. It might have been a wreck—would have been, probably, as a Christian life—had not grace at that time conquered, and the striving of God's Spirit been obeyed.

I well remember how that night, as I went home to my lodgings, my heart was as light as my pocket. The dark, deserted streets resounded with a hymn of praise that I could not restrain. When I took my basin of gruel before retiring, I would not have exchanged it for a prince's feast. I reminded the Lord as I knelt at my bedside of His own Word, "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord"; I asked Him not to let my loan be a long one, or I should have no dinner next day. And with peace within and peace without, I spent a happy, restful night.[1]

[1] *Hudson Taylor in Early Years*, 133.

2. *Hope.*—To draw in devotion the exact line where faith merges into trust, and trust into hope, is not so essential as it would be in the province of Christian ethics. Both faith and hope blend in one object, but "they can be distinguished when viewed in reference to the nature of man: for by the one we have a clear mental realization of the promise; by the other we apply that truth to our needs, make it our own, and stimulate the will to respond to it". There is no element of tenderness in the Lord's ministry on earth more touching than the effort made by Him to uphold the hope of those who sought His aid. To the palsied man, conscious of the sin which lay behind the helpless suffering, there came on the instant the gracious words, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven". "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us"—such was the almost despairing cry of the father of the demoniac boy. It was not only to sustain his faith, but to infuse hope into the prayer so timidly made, that "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst! All things are possible to him that believeth"—"the decision rests with you rather than with Me whether this thing can be done; it can be done if thou believest"—and hope nerved the final appeal, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief". So the typical faith of Abraham had been sustained by hope. "Who," says St. Paul, "in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, So shall thy seed be." So a psalmist met his own questioning despondency by rousing himself, through an act of will, to hope:—

> "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
> And why art thou disquieted within me?
> Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him,
> For the health of his countenance."

He turns from feelings; they are variable. He turns from a review of action, because he cannot judge of it aright, and, at the best, it can afford small comfort save to the self-complacent. He goes to God. What God is in Himself, not what we may chance to find Him in this or that moment to be, that is our hope.

> Be not afraid to pray—to pray is right.
> Pray, if thou canst, with hope; but ever pray,

Though hope be weak, or sick with long delay;
Pray in the darkness, if there be no light.
Far is the time, remote from human sight,
When war and discord on the earth shall cease.
Yet every prayer for universal peace
Avails the blessed time to expedite.
Whate'er is good to wish, ask that of Heaven,
Though it be what thou canst not hope to see:
Pray to be perfect, though material leaven
Forbid the spirit so on earth to be;
But if for any wish thou darest not pray,
Then pray to God to cast that wish away.[1]

3. *Love.*—Love to God, itself due to God's own gift of power to love Him, is the cause of that singleness of heart and aim, that simple, downright obedience, which are essential to acceptable prayer. Behind the simplicity of the 119th Psalm, of which the core and centre is that all life is from God, for God, and in God, there is love. It was love that gave its author his firmness in resolution, his keen insight into the will of God, and inspired the prayer, in form manifold, though one in intention, that his own will might correspond with the "good and acceptable and perfect will of God".

(1) *Love of God* is the secret of power in prayer. The difficulties most often complained of as hindrances to prayer may be traced back to want of love. Want of love destroys our interest in prayer, so that our thoughts wander to other things. Want of love destroys our delight in prayer, so that it becomes a weariness to us, and our hearts find themselves cold and dry.

(2) The love in which our Lord laid the foundation of prayer includes *love to man* in love to God. If God is the Father of us, we should love one another as brethren. Where the loving, generous heart is given, there also that forgiving spirit on which our Lord thrice insisted with repeated earnestness as essential to our own forgiveness, and therefore to the acceptance of our prayer and offerings, will not be withheld.

¶ The love that is a constraining principle in life is not ordinary commonplace affection, but a passion of love. The harder the task, the greater the love that it demands. A comparatively cold,

[1] Hartley Coleridge.

intellectual regard cannot do the work of an ardent, glowing heart-devotion. Only when love burns within as a perpetual fire does it generate the degree of force needed to propel desires and purposes over a difficult road to their goal. Nothing is absolutely irresistible save love; and nothing else can stand the strain of a desperate and protracted contest. Lesser motives tend to give way if too severely tried, but love is equal to all contingencies. Therefore the cause that we espouse, the person we would save and bless, or the purpose we would realize, must be loved with a passionate love, must be to us as our own soul. And when the cause totters under the heavy blows of the enemy, so that to bear it up becomes an almost intolerable strain, love will be found equal to the task. When the weakness, the defects, and unworthiness of the persons or communities we pray and work for reveal themselves as far beyond our worst fears, love will not falter, but hopefully, patiently, perseveringly continue its ministry. When delays and disappointments obstruct and discouragement threatens, love will pierce beyond the veil and see the yet invisible success; it will wax stronger and stronger in faith till, by the very pressure of its yearning intensity, vision passes on to prevision—becoming, as in Browning's "Saul," prophetic, and wresting from the future gleams of light and hope wherewith to cheer the difficult present.[1]

IV.

Importunity.

1. Prayer should be strenuously importunate. Not petitionary merely, or concentrated, or active alone, but importunate. For prayer is not meditation or communion only. Nor ought it to be merely submissive in tone, as the "quietist" ideal is. We need not begin with "Thy will be done" if we but end with it. Remember the stress that Christ laid on importunity. Strenuous prayer will help us to recover the masculine type of religion, and then our opponents will at least respect us.

2. The need of persevering, importunate prayer appears to some to be at variance with the faith which knows that it has received what it asks (Mark xi. 24). One of the mysteries of the Divine life is the harmony between the gradual and the sudden,

[1] L. Swetenham, *Conquering Prayer*, 200.

immediate full possession and slow imperfect appropriation. And so here persevering prayer appears to be the school in which the soul is strengthened for the boldness of faith. And with the diversity of operations of the Spirit there may be some in whom faith takes more the form of persistent waiting, while to others triumphant thanksgiving appears the only proper expression of the assurance of having been heard.

(1) Importunity is necessary for two reasons. First, because prayer is not only the satisfaction of our needs but the discharge of a duty and the test of inward loyalty towards God, the grace of perseverance is essential to its practice. In the searching words of the *Serious Call* on daily early prayer, William Law points out that prayer is not a question of moods and fancies, but of duty and discipline, although the sense of duty and the discipline are energized by love.

¶ Even dull and spiritless prayer, if only it be faithfully persevered in, accustoms the soul to Christ's Cross; disciplines it against self, teaches it humility; teaches it in the hidden way of the faith. If our prayers were always clear, if they never lacked unction, feeling, fervour, we should feed all our lives through on a milk diet and lack the discipline of dry bread; we should seek only the sweets and pleasures we could feel, instead of persisting after self-sacrifice and death; we should be as the folk whom Jesus reproached because they followed Him not for His doctrine but for the loaves and fishes. Reject not the exercise of prayer, then, even though your prayer appear spiritless, dull, distracted. Endure to be bored patiently, so it be for the love of God. Would you waste your time in beating away the flies that buzz around your ears? Suffer them rather to buzz, and use yourself to go on with your work as though they were miles away.[1]

¶ When the self-indulgent neighbour endeavoured to escape the trouble of providing his friend with three loaves, it was selfishness and sloth that created the delay and made the difficulty. When the unjust judge over and over again slighted the appeal of the injured widow, it was only reckless carelessness and indifference to the claims of right and duty that led him to keep her waiting. But when our heavenly Father seems to act, in some respects, as they did, and the longed-for answer does not appear to come, it is not selfishness or carelessness, but love, that induces the delay,

[1] Fénelon.

in order that the value of the blessing may be increased by importunity.[1]

(2) "Importunity," writes Bishop Wilson, "makes no change in God, but it creates in us such dispositions as God thinks fit to reward"; and thus continuance in prayer becomes a test of character. To give up the special request may mean distrust of God, or impatience, or indolence, or even some secret tendency to veiled rebellion against His will.

¶ A child who had wandered from a mountain road, in the summer of 1900, lost his life among "the Brecon Beacons". Had he walked only a few yards farther from the spot where his body at last was found, he would have seen his home in the valley just below the mountain, and have been easily guided to the pathway descending to it. He paused in his weariness at a point where nothing met his eye but the bare hills around. In that pathetic incident is there not a parable of much spiritual loss? The gift that might have been cultivated, the blessing that might have been won, the grace by which weakness might have been transformed into strength, the temptation that might have been subdued, the work that might have been so useful in the Church's cause, lost at a point where only one more effort was needed to secure it. Midway between "the spirit," with its upward aspirations, and "the flesh" in our fallen state, with its downward tendencies, there lies "the soul," the scene of momentous decisions whether to fall under "the mind of the flesh," which is death, or under "the mind of the spirit," empowered by the Divine Spirit, which is "life and peace". In the years of our conflict, the Lord's solemn charge to "watch and pray" is a summons to self-discipline and importunity in prayer, but the charge may be linked with the gracious promise by which He crowns endurance with victory: "In your patience ye shall win your souls".[2]

¶ I sat in a quiet corner unseen, with locked hands and the tears dripping on them, pleading, pleading, God would use him as the instrument to draw those men that night. Deeper and deeper grew the feeling as he told, quietly and briefly, the story of what he had seen and heard, and what he believed God was doing in Wales and questioning was He going to do it in England? My pleading had become a veritable agony; the Holy Spirit's brooding presence an awesome thing in its solemn intensity, when suddenly he said something that held me and drew me.

[1] Canon Hay Aitken, *The Divine Ordinance of Prayer*, 99.
[2] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 205.

I lifted my head and listened—was transfixed by his face and words—stopped my pleading and followed him intently. Once he looked uneasily towards me. I did not know what he meant. His words were burning with fire and beauty. Then something happened; he was swung off in another direction. Men caught their breath, the tension lessened, he sat down, and though every soul was deeply moved—scores of their eyes were wet—yet the tongues of flame were held back; they came not that night. And we sat, two sad and disappointed creatures; and when at last the meeting was over and he came down from the platform and reaching my side, he seized my arm fiercely, saying, "You were praying for me to-night, were you not?" I nodded. "And you stopped in the middle of my speech. Oh, why did you, why did you? All the power went out of me, I could feel it go, and could not imagine what was the matter with me, till I glanced at you and saw you listening. Never, never do that again. To think we might have been in the thick of the Revival this very night, if you had been faithful." [1]

[1] Estelle W. Stead, *My Father*, 280.

X.

Minor Aids to Prayer.

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Minor Aids to Prayer.

The fundamental conditions of prayer are the preference of the will of God to our own will, conformity to Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. These and other important claims have already been before us. Now we are to consider certain less necessary but very helpful conditions to true prayer. Let us take them in this order: Preparation, Practice, Definiteness, Humility, Energy, Patience, and Service.

i. Preparation.

The life of prayer is a thing of gradual attainment, through all the degrees that separate the child who learns the Lord's Prayer by rote at his mother's knee from the saint who, out of great tribulation, has wrought his life into a Lord's Prayer. For, however natural a function prayer may be of our personality, it is hard to practise in our sinful state. We can no more pray at will, without having carefully acquired the capacity, than we can perform on a musical instrument that we have never seen or handled before. We have therefore to learn to pray. The rudimentary instinct, indeed, is present throughout the human race, as we see from the recorded history of every people in every age. But its action is often atrophied, and always spasmodic, irregular, uncertain, until it has been trained; and its training is a laborious work.

¶ *Ante orationem prapara animam tuam.* The wisman giffis the counsale, O christin man and woman, to prepare thi mynd afore thi prayer. That is to say, afore thow begyn to mak thi prayer, tak gud tent that thow mak it with sic ane mynd, that it may be acceptabil to God, and hard of him. Thairfor thow sal understand, that thair is thre vertewis, quhairwith thou suld prepare thi mynd afore thi prayer. The first is faith. The secund is hoip. The thrid is cherite.[1]

[1] *Archbishop Hamilton's Catechism*, 241.

1. The best way to learn to pray is to practise praying. We shall look at that in a moment. But notice three exercises which help to bring us into the right mind for prayer. And first, *Meditation.* To live before God, to meditate on His words and works, to ascribe glory to His name, revealed to us now fully, is impossible without the transition of this state of realizing God into the act of prayer. Meditation is the necessary basis and element out of which prayer proceeds, and into which it returns.

¶ "Shut thy door." The reason is plain. He who would pray must first retire: the spirit of the world and the spirit of prayer are contrary the one to the other. Business or pleasure, or even common conversation if it continue for any long time, will strangely indispose the mind for devotion; and the soul, before she can take her flight to heaven, must plume and balance her wings by holy meditation; she must rally her scattered and dissipated thoughts, and fix them on the business she is going about; she must consider the nature of God to whom she is to pray; of herself who is to pray to Him: she must know the sins she has been guilty of to confess them; and the grace she stands in need of to petition for it. All this is not to be done but by deep meditation, which is the mother of devotion and the daughter of retirement. They who do not meditate cannot pray; and they who do not retire can do neither.[1]

¶ Here be those men reproved that give them more to meditation than to prayer. They know not that God's word is full of fire, and may purge the filth of sin. Also the souls of them that pray be inflamed with love, and though we may not bring our heart into stableness and sadness [i.e. stedfastness] of prayer soon as we will, yet shall we not leave off our prayer, but we shall waxen by little and little, and at the last Christ of His goodness will put our heart in stedfastness; and to this helpeth meditation, if it be reasonable and measurable.[2]

2. *Fasting* is to be used. Now, as ordinarily employed, the term "fasting" stands for abstinence from food and from certain forms of pleasure that appeal to the senses. By this abstinence it is believed that the spirit grows stronger and is furthered in its efforts to reach out into the unseen and the invisible. This view is true as far as it goes, but we look instinctively for a deeper significance, and we find that fasting is a symbol of tre-

[1] Bishop Horne. [2] Richard Rolle, *The Mending of Life*, 48.

mendous import. In its highest aspect it represents that inward act of supreme self-abnegation by which, in view of some stupendous undertaking which demands the concentrated force of his entire nature, a man withdraws, for a while, all his energies and interests from the various spheres in which they are operating, and brings them to bear upon the single task before him.

¶ Fasting represents an attitude of detachment from the things of time and sense, whether it be from food, or pleasure, or lawful ambition. Prayer represents the complementary attitude of attachment to the things of God and the spiritual world. When we thus realize our need of detachment from earth we shall readily determine, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what particular forms our fasting shall take. In the times of our Puritan forefathers the spiritual value of fasting from food was fully realized, and there can be no doubt whatever of the relation of physical food to spiritual blessing. The sin of overeating is only too apt to hinder spiritual power in prayer, while if we "keep under the body" we shall certainly be conscious of more liberty and blessing as we fulfil our work of prayer and intercession. What we need concerning food, dress, books, recreation, friendship, ambition, is the resolute determination to be above them, superior to them, in order that the spiritual may rule everything. Like St. Paul, we should say, "All things are lawful for me; but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Cor. vi. 12). This is the true idea of fasting, and in this spirit of detachment from things earthly we obtain one of the true accompaniments of, and helps to, that spirit of attachment to God which is found in prayer.[1]

3. Prayer may often be profitably preceded by the *reading of Scripture*. No other book is such a mirror both of man and of God. Here we see our own countenance, and we are humbled; here we see the countenance of God, and we are comforted. Here we behold the human heart, with its unbelief, its selfish and carnal thoughts, its tendency to hypocrisy, to seek rest in mere shadows. In reading Scripture, we feel in the presence of Him before whose eyes all things are naked and open. The Word is like a sharp sword; all that is confused and mixed in our thoughts and hearts is severed, the heavenly separated from the earthly, and the thoughts and intents of the hearts discerned. When in this Book we read the experiences of God's people, the patriarchs,

[1] W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Life Abiding and Abounding*, 96.

the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness, the life of David, we feel that we are reading our own history. As Ulysses wept when he heard his own sorrows recited by the minstrel at the court of King Alcinous, so, as we read in Scripture of the sins, failures, hopes, and fears of God's children, we see our own hearts and lives. When the inner life of God's saints is unveiled to us, as in the Psalms, the Book of Job, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and indeed throughout Scripture, so that, as Luther says, "we see into the very hearts of these men, and not merely behold paradise and heaven itself there, but also death, and even hell," we possess in these apparently subjective and purely human delineations the teaching of the Holy Ghost, who presents to us truthfully and perfectly the conflict in human souls between God's grace and their sin and weakness, and provides us with a guide-book, in which all possible difficulties and errors are noticed, and the true remedies and correctives indicated.

¶ Little of the Word, with little prayer, is death to the spiritual life. Much of the Word, with little prayer, gives a sickly life. Much prayer with little of the Word gives more life, but without stedfastness. A full measure of the Word and prayer each day give a healthy and powerful life.[1]

¶ I have often noticed how frequently in Wesley's hymns, which are surely a storehouse of devotional utterance, the prayer has been suggested by a text. The poet's eye has caught the full beauty of the idea concealed in some almost unnoticed text, and, as in a moment, the spiritual aspiration converts the text into a prayer, that is all the more effectual because it is the inspired child of an inspiration.[2]

ii. Practice.

The mental or moral effort involved in concentration of the mind on spiritual things becomes easier by repetition, like any other habit, and, like any other habit, it is achieved, as a rule, gradually and after many a fall. For if prayer be in essence the voluntary turning of the soul to God, it needs no long or elaborate use of words. It may be, as the hymn says, only "the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear". We can begin to acquire the art of prayer by learning, as it were, its alphabet. Scattered

[1] Andrew Murray, *The Prayer-Life*, 100.

[2] Canon Hay Aitken, *The Divine Ordinance of Prayer*, 307.

throughout the pages of the Bible and the Prayer-Book and the great classics of Christian devotion will be found many a brief but pregnant phrase or sentence on which our spirits can wing their way to the heart of the Father in heaven.

"Create in me a clean heart, O God;
And renew a right spirit within me."

"Search me, O God, and know my heart:
Try me, and know my thoughts:
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting."

"God be merciful to me a sinner."

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
And am no more worthy to be called thy son."

"O send out thy light and thy truth;
That they may lead me."

These brief sentences are typical of many at our disposal. Beginning with such as these, we can gradually extend the scope of our prayer until the habit becomes as essential to our spiritual life as food and exercise are to the life of the body. But not only is the art of prayer difficult of attainment conceived as an exercise of mind; much of the failure in prayer that we deplore is owing to absence of that moral condition out of which alone true prayer can spring. This condition is absolute sincerity, perfect truthfulness. For the things about which we pray to God are the most sacred intimacies of life—the sins we have committed and the uncommitted sins we have imagined; the self-created difficulties in the management of our own characters; our refusal to live up to the level of visions that have come to us in moments of insight and inspiration; the cowardice which has shrunk from opportunities of service to our fellow-men, or things more poignant still—the harsh words we have spoken and the unloving acts we have done to loved ones now beyond the reach of our penitence; the lack of a large and generous and forgiving spirit to those who are still with us; the inarticulate hungerings and thirstings for redemption from ourselves, from the bondage of evil, for reconciliation with God and the world. But to think

truly and honestly about these things, to throw off the subtle disguises with which self-seeking would deceive us, demands an integrity and singleness of mind that are certainly not the work of a few brief, hurried moments. It is here that the sad contradiction which we see in some lives finds its explanation. The defender of prayer is pointed to persons brought up under the influence of religion, and finding an apparent pleasure in the exercises of religion, who yet remain hard, selfish, un-Christlike. What value can prayer have, it is triumphantly asked, when it has failed to renew those with whom it has been a custom for years? The answer is obvious. Prayer itself, in the case of these persons, has become degraded to the low level on which their lives are led. It is implicated in their general insincerity of character. Having never come face to face with their real selves their praying has not been real. It has been that most hateful of all things, shallow make-believe.

¶ Prayer is a trade to be learned. We must be apprentices and serve our time at it. Painstaking care, much thought, practice and labour are required to be a skilful tradesman in praying. Practice in this, as well as in all other trades, makes perfect. Toiling hands and hearts alone make proficients in this heavenly trade.[1]

¶ It was a great musician who said that if he omitted his six-hours-a-day practice for one day *he* knew it, if he omitted it for two days the *critics* knew it, and if he omitted it for three days the *public* knew it.

The mighty pyramids of stone
  That wedge-like cleave the desert airs,
When nearer seen, and better known,
  Are but gigantic flights of stairs.

The heights by great men reached and kept
  Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
  Were toiling upward in the night.

So it is with prayer. It is, in its highest potency, the fruit of a long self-discipline and practice.[2]

[1] E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer*, 48.
[2] Cuthbert MacEvoy, *The Way of Prayer*, 88.

iii. Definiteness.

"Let your requests be made known unto God"—St. Paul has definite items of prayer in mind, and so had Epaphras, and so must we have. The command "Pray without ceasing" might lead to our being content with a mere mental attitude, a general consent to prayer which is possible to the most careless minds. But intention to pray can never supply the place of attention to our prayers. A passive desire to live in the atmosphere of prayer is dangerous unless it finds its proper activity in definite exercises of prayer.

"Making mention of thee in my prayers"—does this not bring us near to the secret of prevailing prayer? We are afraid to be individual and particular; we lose ourselves in large generalities, until our prayers die of very vagueness. There is surely a more excellent way. "My God," Paul wrote to the Philippians, "shall fulfil"—not merely "all your need," as the Authorized Version has it, but—"every need of yours." There is a fine discrimination in the Divine love which sifts and sorts men's needs, and applies itself to them one by one, just as the need may be. And when in prayer we speak to God, let it be not only of "all our need," flung in one great, careless heap before Him, but of "every need of ours," each one named by its name, and all spread out in order before Him.

¶ Direct appeal to God can only be justified when it is passionate. To come maundering into His presence when we have nothing particular to say is an insult upon which we should never presume if we had a petition to offer to any earthly personage.[1]

¶ Suppose that a number of petitioners should go to the legislature with a petition worded thus: "We humbly pray your honourable house to do everything for the nation, to take infinite care of it, to let the affairs of the nation tax your attention day and night, and lavish all your resources upon the people". Suppose that a petition like that should be handed in to the House of Commons, what would be the fate of it? It would be laughed down, and the only reason why the petitioners should not be confined to Bedlam would be lest their insanity should alarm the inmates. That is not a petition. It is void by generality; by referring to *all* it misses everything. You must specify what

[1] Mark Rutherford.

you want when you go to the legislature. You must state your case with clearness of definition, and with somewhat of argument. If it be so in our social or political prayers, shall we go to Almighty God with a vagueness which means nothing, with a generality which makes no special demand upon His heart?[1]

¶ A mother who had been long anxious for her son's conversion, and had long prayed for this blessing, was sitting one evening in the large hall of the Carrubber's Close Mission Buildings. As she sat listening to the speaker of the evening the desire for her boy's conversion presented itself very strongly to her mind. She prayed the Lord that He might graciously lead her son to the meeting that evening, and that a particular worker might speak to him. At the close of the service, and while the inquiry meeting was going on, she turned round to see what was being done. What was her astonishment to see her son seated there in a back seat, and this particular worker who had been in her prayers quietly speaking to him. At this glad sight she calmly settled herself down to prayer again that the Lord that night might lead him to decision. Need we say that that night she had the joy of knowing that her son had accepted Jesus as his Saviour?[2]

iv. Humility.

In marvellous language the Divine Presence is pledged to the humble: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones". The figures of the "poor" whose "cry" is not forgotten, of the "meek" whose "desire" is heard, of the "humble" to whom grace is given, meet us constantly in psalm, and prophecy, and epistle. If our Lord, as we have seen, encouraged hope, His was the hand which drew the picture of the worshipper "standing afar off," who "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner".

Our Lord has not only warned us of the pride of the Pharisee who in prayer thanked God that he was not like other men; He has, besides, warned us against ambition, which often occurs in believing disciples who desire that God would give them a pro-

[1] Joseph Parker.

[2] *William Robertson of Carrubber's Close Mission*, 142.

minent position before others. The sons of Zebedee (Mark x. 35 ff.), who entreat the Lord, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory," receive a correction ("Ye know not what ye ask"), to which the Lord adds the words, "To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but (only to those shall it be given) for whom it is prepared". And with this our Lord has, once for all, rejected all vain fantastically ambitious prayers, although that ambition may give itself out as a holy ambition. But the exhortation here contained, to be satisfied with God's grace, is specially applicable also to a longing often appearing in the course of Church History, namely, for signs and wonders, as a fruit of prayer (that is, for surprising, as it were tangible, answers to prayer), or for raptures, visions, and revelations in prayer. It is applicable to religious voluptuousness, to religious eudæmonism, which is always merely longing to have blessed experiences in prayer, to receive lively impressions and feelings of the sweetness of God's love, like a lover who every moment desires new tokens of love, new proofs, new assurances that he is really loved, without considering that it belongs to the very essence of true love to believe in love even when no special signs of it appear; nay, when *seeming* signs of the opposite occur.

Nothing is more beautiful, nothing more encouraging, than the prayer, with the answer given to it, of a man in whom strength of character is matched by the humility of a child. In recent biography, no example is more striking than that of Bishop John Selwyn, whose life from early boyhood to its suffering close was moulded by prayer. One incident, in which the answer to prayer was immediate and visible, gives a glimpse into the secret forces of such a character. The Bishop was, at the moment, in doubt whether or not he should land at Nukapu, an island in the group where Bishop Patteson had met his death. He did not trust to his own courage, or experience, or resource. "As the mission party were deliberating, while the canoes of the islanders surrounded 'the Southern Cross,'" an eye-witness wrote, "the Bishop left the deck, and went below into the cabin, and presently I looked through the skylight, and there saw the Bishop on his knees, and that strong earnest look upon his face which we all knew so well, asking God to direct him in this matter.

Whilst he was there praying, the canoes all cleared off, and went back to the island, so that when he came on deck again the disappearance of the canoes settled the question. The natives of this island were at that time evidently most nervous and suspicious, and there can be no doubt that it would have been unwise and running an unnecessary risk to have tested them too severely on that first occasion."

¶ Humility is not a mere passive virtue, it is active and strenuous; it goes about doing good. For humility in its working is simply love in self-forgetfulness, love spending and being spent, without any reflex thought flung back upon itself. It toils and suffers, "hoping for nothing again". Humility may sometimes sigh when its gifts are spurned; sometimes, even, it may be tempted to remonstrate, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved; but it does not therefore cease from beneficence. Humility is never offended. It never puts an ungenerous construction upon words and acts. It does not grow fretful when it is misunderstood or slighted. It loves on, and "love never faileth". It is so far from reading a reference to itself into the conduct of others that it does not consider itself at all. This earth shines outwards towards the other planets with a light which we who walk on its surface have never seen. And humility is ignorant that its face is radiant in the summer light of God.[1]

¶ "Did you get low enough to be blessed?" was the question once asked by a saintly man, when speaking to some who had gathered to pray for a revival in the Church. "Low enough to be blessed"—that is what God is often waiting for, before an answer to my prayers can come. "Lord, give me loftier views of Christ," is the cry of some eager heart; and God says, "Yes, I will; but first you must have deeper and more humbling views of yourself". "Lord, use me to do great things for Thee". "Yes, but are you completely willing to be only the tool, and not the hand that moves it?" "Lord, I would fain be full of the Holy Ghost and of power; wilt Thou make me a brilliant lamp, giving clear and steady light?" "Yes, but I must first empty you of all your own oil, and so make room for that fulness of the Spirit to get in."[2]

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *Waymarks in the Pursuit of God*, 211.
[2] G. H. Knight, *The Master's Questions to His Disciples*, 19.

v. Energy.

The call to prayer means a call to work, not a summons to set a-going a machine which needs neither brain nor heart. It is a call to gather up all the forces of the soul, and to summon them to the intensest activity. It is indeed the highest exercise to which a man can be called. Remark the expressions used in Scripture to describe prayer. When Jacob prayed it is said that he *wrestled*—"and he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me". In the Psalms the suppliant *cries*—"cries with a loud voice". "I am weary with my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." Elijah, though a man of like passions with us, "prayed fervently". The prayer which availeth much in its working is the supplication of the righteous man. Such is the expressive language in which prayer is spoken of in Scripture, certainly teaching us the greatness of the work to which we are called when we are summoned to pray. Of Bishop Hamilton of Salisbury it is told how, with all his deep insight into spiritual things, he was accustomed to say that no man was likely to do much good in prayer who did not begin by looking upon it in the light of a work, to be prepared for and persevered in with all the earnestness which we bring to bear upon subjects which are, in our opinion, at once most interesting and most necessary.

¶ Be certain that it is the pure mind we set to perceive. The God discerned in thought is another than he of the senses. And let the prayer be as a little fountain. Rising on a spout, from dread of the hollow below, the prayer may be prolonged in words begetting words, and have a pulse of fervour; the spirit of it has fallen after the first jet. That is the delirious energy of our craving, which has no life in our souls. We do not get to any heaven by renouncing the Mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations.[1]

¶ It is productive of much mischief to try to make people believe that the life of prayer is easy. In reality there is nothing quite so difficult as strong prayer, nothing so worthy of the attention and the exercise of all the fine parts of a great manhood. On the other hand, there is no man who is not equal to the task. So splendid has this human nature of ours become through the

[1] George Meredith.

Incarnation that it can bear any strain and meet any demand that God sees fit to put upon it. Some duties are individual and special, and there is exemption from them for the many, but there is never any absolution from a duty for which a man has a capacity. There is one universal society, the Church, for which all are eligible, and with which all are bound to unite; there is one universal book, the Bible, which all can understand, and which it is the duty of all to read; there is one universal art, prayer, in which all may become well skilled and to the acquirement of which all must bend their energies.[1]

¶ I remember once, in the early summer of 1884, seeing a sight in India which made a permanent impression on my mind. In the modern busy street in Calcutta, called Bow Bazaar, in which the Oxford Mission House used to stand, I saw by the side of the tram-line a man, stark naked, with chains round feet and hands. He was lying flat in the dust, measuring his length on the ground. He rose as I was looking, advanced a few paces, and, standing upright, with his feet where his nose had marked the dust, he prostrated himself again, and proceeded to go through the same motions. He was a fakir or devotee of some sort, and I was assured that he was going to travel in this manner all the hundreds of weary miles which intervene between Calcutta and the sacred city of Benares. My first feeling was, I fear, one of disgust and contempt at the superstitious folly of the man. But I hope it was soon overtaken and checked by a consideration both worthier and with more of humility in it—the consideration, I mean, that he, in his belated ignorance of the character of God and of the way to serve Him, was taking a great deal more pains about his devotions than I was in the habit of doing with my better knowledge.[2]

¶ Livingstone reports of Robert Bruce that in prayer "every sentence was like a strong bolt shot up to heaven". The biographer of Richard Baxter tells us that when he gathered his spirit together to pray, it "took wing for heaven". And it is related in similar terms of Archbishop Leighton that "his manner of praying was so earnest and importunate as proved that his soul mounted up to God in the flame of his own aspirations". Henry Martyn notes in his diary that, having set apart a day for fasting and humiliation, he began to pray for the establishment of the Divine Kingdom upon earth, with particular mention of India. He received so great enlargement, and had such energy and de-

[1] Bishop Brent, *With God in the World*, 1.

[2] Bishop Gore, *Prayer, and the Lord's Prayer*, 3.

light in prayer as he had never before experienced. He adds, "My whole soul wrestled with God. I knew not how to leave off crying to Him to fulfil His promises, chiefly pleading His own glorious power."[1]

vi. Patience.

To earnestness and effort in prayer add patient expectation. To say that we are earnest in our prayer is just to say that we conceive ourselves good; in being earnest, people think they have done their part, and that they have manifested a right feeling when they have asked a thing sincerely and pleaded hard for it. But their earnestness proves only something about themselves and their own choice of good things, not any confidence in God's goodness or love. Prayer is the offering of our desires to God for things according to His will; and our concluding with the word "Amen!" is understood to express our confidence that God both hears our prayers and will answer them. Whatever God has revealed to us as a subject for prayer He has placed within our reach. To ask God for a thing, not believing that He is willing to give it, is to go not on God's promise but on a venture. The most familiar, and perhaps the most impressive, description of prayer in the Old Testament is found in those numerous passages where the life of intercourse with God is spoken of as a waiting upon Him. Professor A. B. Davidson has given a beautiful definition of waiting upon God: "To wait is not merely to remain passive. It is to expect—to look for with patience, and also with submission. It is to long for, but not impatiently; to look for, but not to fret at the delay; to watch for, but not restlessly; to feel that if He does not come we will acquiesce, and yet to refuse to let the mind acquiesce in the feeling that He will not come."

¶ The discovery of the Hebrew original of the Apocryphal book known as Ecclesiasticus has restored an interesting text to us: Sirach vii. 10, "Be not impatient in prayer". It is lost in the Greek version but the Hebrew preserves it. Be not impatient in prayer. It is one of the wisest things ever said on the subject. Impatient our prayer mostly is; yet impatience destroys at least the half of our prayer's worth. The Hebrew noun *tephillah*,

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 129.

"prayer," is of the same root as the Hebrew verb for "judge," "arbitrate". An element of judgment or deliberation is the requisite complement to the flow, the rush of spiritual emotion. The two elements—consideration and free abandonment, restraint and impulse—must go together to compose the genuine idea of prayer. Impatience is the child's posture. Tom Tulliver's faith in prayer broke down when, after praying in bed overnight for Divine help, he still could not remember his Latin verbs in school next day. We must approach God as children: simple, reliant, trustful. But we must not approach Him childishly. "Wait thou for the Lord," says the Psalmist; or, as the fine English Prayer-Book version has it: "O tarry thou the Lord's leisure," "Be strong; let thine heart take courage; yea, wait thou for the Lord".[1]

vii. Service.

Some who think themselves of a practical turn of mind say, "The great thing is work: prayer is good, and right, but the great need is to be doing something practical". The truth is that when a man understands about prayer, and puts prayer in its right place in his life, he finds a new motive power burning in his bones to be *doing;* and, further, he finds that it is the doing which grows out of praying that is mightiest in touching human hearts. And he finds further, yet with a great joy, that he may be *doing* something for an entire world. His service becomes as broad as his Master's thought.

¶ There is a legend of a monk to whom in his chamber the Lord vouchsafed to appear in a vision. The vision of Christ brought great peace and joy to his heart. Scarcely had he been thus favoured for a few moments, when the bell was heard which summoned him to the duty of distributing loaves of bread to the poor. For a moment he hesitated; but he went to his work. Oh, what a sacrifice to leave this glorious vision for the dull routine of duty! But when he returned to his cell, what was his surprise and joy to find the vision of the Lord as before.[2]

1. The close relation between prayer and service discovers two principles: the vanity of prayerless service, and the futility and mistake of merely selfish prayer. Consider the first principle. It is the constant temptation of human pride to think we can

[1] I. Abrahams, in *Jewish Addresses*, 164.
[2] Adolph Saphir, *The Hidden Life*, 214.

dispense with dependence upon God. Prayer is the corrective of fatalism on the one hand and of self-sufficiency on the other. Here we are concerned with the peril of self-sufficiency. It is the constant lesson of the Bible and Church History that such pride goeth before a fall. The collective interests which we represent and which we are called to champion as the Church of Christ, demand of us constant exercise in prayer. The method of progress in the Kingdom of God is by a growing life, and for the creation and sustaining of that life in all its activity prayer is absolutely essential. It is our vital breath.

"Laborare est orare," says the ancient adage. But "to labour" is not "to pray"—not of necessity. For much work may be done, and done nobly and from pure motives, in the service of God and of men, though there may be no thought or consciousness of God at all in the mind of the man who does it. He is absorbed in his work. He is maturing his plans. He is watching the issue of his experiments. He is wholly intent on that which is passing beneath his eyes. And this is good, and may often be essential to success, but it is not what we mean by prayer. Until the soul of the man is uplifted towards God, he has not begun to pray. The distinction must be preserved between saying and doing. Saying —that is, the speech of the soul, whether the lips move or not— is prayer. Doing is not prayer, unless, indeed, the thing done be done explicitly and consciously, as a sign of love or an act of praise, or is regarded by the man who does it as the distinct and deliberate expression of some other feeling which he has towards God. Prayer does not necessarily involve anything more than the direct, conscious uplifting of the soul towards God, but it always does involve that.

¶ The monks of old were too often content with prayer unaccompanied by any practical effort, and ended by leading idle, useless lives, in which prayer was a mere form. Now, on the other hand, the servants of Christ are tempted to labour only, and neglect to give sufficient time to prayer; yet, if they do, their work is bound to suffer. In the words of the Bishop of Liverpool: By an error of judgment, or perhaps by the subtle force of inclination, which we mistake for necessity, we work when we ought to pray, because to an active mind work is far easier than prayer. Then God cannot bless us, because we have weakened our capacity to receive. We grow feeble and shallow

and distracted. Our work is done superficially, and will not stand; the ring goes out of our message, and our life loses its power. The servant whom the Holy Spirit is to use must resist the tyranny of overwork. He must resolve to be alone with God, even if he appear to rob his fellow-men of his services. It is said of that mighty spirit of the middle ages, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, that he found on the days when he spent most time in prayer and in study of the Bible his letters were most rapidly written and most persuasive, and his own schemes were widened or lost in the greater purpose of God; anxiety was allayed, and the power of the Holy Spirit, to which he had opened his heart, was felt in every word he spake, and in his very presence and look. Prayer is indeed work; and there are times when it is the only work in which men should engage. For it is calling on God to put forth His mighty power, and to use us as willing and efficient instruments in His hands.[1]

¶ Westcott read and worked in the very mind with which he prayed; and his prayer was of singular intensity. It might be only the elements of textual criticism with which he was dealing; but still it was all steeped in the atmosphere of awe, and devotion, and mystery, and consecration. He taught us as one who ministered at an Altar; and the details of the Sacred Text were, to him, as the Ritual of some Sacramental action.[2]

¶ To very many families, Dr. Harry Rainy was indeed "the beloved physician," and to this day there are in Glasgow persons, now aged, who recall his kindness to them during some illness of their youth with the warmest gratitude. Every patient under his hands was a subject of his prayers—a fact which was revealed only towards the very end of his life, when he mentioned it in counselling a young doctor "never to spare either pains or prayers over his cases".[3]

2. The second principle brought out by the relation between prayer and service is the futility and mistake of selfish prayer. To preserve the balance and sanity of our thought of prayer in relation to service, we must remember that purposeless prayer is vain. If service has its dangers of lacking the salt and strength of devoutness, it is equally true that prayer needs the constant savour of service. If prayer is not to degenerate into morbid sentimentality, it must be freed from selfishness and self-satis-

[1] W. H. Dundas, in *The Churchman*, Jan. 1906, p. 32.
[2] Henry Scott Holland, *Personal Studies*, 130.
[3] P. Carnegie Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, i. 22.

faction. The central aspiration of all prayer has been recognized in this: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done". The active and the passive both find place. All the requests we ever utter for daily bread or forgiveness have in this their ultimate sanction or plea. This is praying in the name of Christ, praying in the Spirit. Religious selfishness seeketh its own, covets pious rapture or glowing vision for its own sake. Consequently its moods may have the luxuriance of a jungle or a fetid swamp. The River of God carries life whithersoever it goeth. The prayer which ends in "God bless me and mine" is after all akin to the spirit of the man who had much goods laid up for many years. The daintiness and nausea of religious appetite arise from such cramped and circumscribed desires, or from unfaithfulness to the behests of prayer. If prayerless service has its perils, serviceless prayer has them no less.

¶ It is said that the Lamas of Tibet scatter paper horses in the air with the idea that they may be transformed to Arab steeds. Prayer is not such futile and silly expressions of desire. It is the incorporation of ourselves with wider interests. It is the identification of ourselves with others' sorrows, and our own sorrows with theirs, the creation through all our lives of wider social sympathy and striving. All is made to minister to increased fitness to the noblest ends of life. Even self-development is not complete as an end. In the goal of our becoming what God wills is enshrined the possibility and desire of doing His will. "Father, glorify thy name" is the constant refrain both of enduring and of endeavour.

> Esteeming sorrow whose employ
> Is to develop, not destroy,
> Far better than a barren joy,

we rejoice even in tribulation. Prayer is the school of the heart in this braver view of life's discipline. It is the act of faith whereby that optimism in the interpretation of life is maintained. Tennyson has well expressed the spirit of such prayer:—

> Steel me with patience! soften me with grief!
> Let blow the trumpet strongly while I pray,
> Till this embattled wall of unbelief,
> My prison, not my fortress, fall away!
> Then, if Thou willest, let my day, be brief,
> So Thou wilt strike Thy glory thro' the day.[1]

[1] A. E. Baloh, *Prayer*, 89.

¶ Some commented upon the Cunard Company's "wonderful run of luck". Others talked about a "special interposition of Providence" on behalf of the Cunarders. Indeed, there was a story current that the sailing of every ship of the Cunard fleet was made the subject of special prayer, and that Mr. Burns was wont to attribute his success to this source. Mr. Burns, however, would never recognize this as the true interpretation of the position. He held that there were certain elements that made for the safety of a vessel, and that these elements were within human control. He was scrupulously careful in providing his ships with all these features even if he sacrificed speed, risked his profits, and invited public censure by doing so. "I believe implicitly," he would say, "in the power of prayer; but I also believe in doing work well, and in subordinating profit, and speed, and public opinion to safety, comfort, and efficiency."[1]

How infinite and sweet, Thou everywhere
And all-abounding Love, Thy service is!
Thou liest an ocean round my world of care,
My petty every-day; and fresh and fair
Pour Thy strong tides through all my crevices,
Until the silence ripples into prayer.

That Thy full glory may abound, increase,
And so Thy likeness shall be formed in me,
I pray; the answer is not rest or peace,
But charges, duties, wants, anxieties,
Till there seems room for everything but Thee,
And never time for anything but these.

And I should fear, but lo! amid the press,
The whirl and hum and pressure of my day,
I hear Thy garment's sweep, Thy seamless dress,
And close beside my work and weariness
Discern Thy gracious form, not far away,
But very near, O Lord, to help and bless.

The busy fingers fly, the eyes may see
Only the glancing needle which they hold,
But all my life is blossoming inwardly,
And every breath is like a litany,
While through each labour, like a thread of gold,
Is woven the sweet consciousness of Thee![2]

[1] F. W. Boreham, *Mountains in the Mist*, 247. [2] S. C. Woolsey.

XI.

Scientific Objections to Prayer.

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Scientific Objections to Prayer.

There are very real and special difficulties connected with the act of prayer. It would be strange if there were not when the mystery of man meets the mystery of God. It would be strange if there were no difficulties attending the speech of man to God. There are intellectual difficulties attending the act, and there are difficulties inherent in the act, that rise to the very surface of a man's mind when he thinks intellectually at all of prayer.

¶ Have you observed that the scientific difficulty has no place in the teachings of Jesus Christ? He does not refer to it even. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive how He could have referred to it. To His mind there could be no difficulty on the Divine side. The Father, to His vision, is Lord of heaven and earth. Nature and nature's laws are under His sway. There is nothing impossible to Him. Our Lord does speak of difficulties in connexion with prayer, and very serious difficulties; but the scientific difficulty is not among them. The difficulties of which He speaks are on man's side. He speaks of the want of faith as a difficulty, of the want of perseverance as a difficulty, of the want of union with Himself as a difficulty. According to His teachings, it is the absence of these that causes prayer to remain unanswered, never by reason of science which makes it impossible.[1]

1. First of all, we must see distinctly what we mean by prayer. We do not mean merely the act of adoration, of admiration, of praise; we mean also the act of petition, of asking our Father in Heaven to give us something, and believing that He will, if He thinks fit, give us the thing we ask for. That is the real test of prayer; that, and that only, is the real difficulty. There is no difficulty in believing that the act of prayer may have some reflex benefit to the soul of the person who prays; to say, for instance, that though we cannot get what we ask, we may indirectly get good dispositions by asking for what we know we cannot have, presents no intellectual difficulty whatever; the

[1] Griffith John, *A Voice from China*, 180.

only difficulty in that case is to imagine the possibility of anyone praying under such conditions.

2. Two objections to prayer on intellectual grounds are made —one from a scientific and the other from a philosophical point of view.

(1) The claim is made that an answer to prayer would involve the interruption of the established order; it would mean, therefore, a violation of law. In the presence of the unbending constancy of the physical system which surrounds us, impressing the average man with its moral indifference, prayer seems like an irrational proceeding. It appears to some minds as the act of a puny being urging upon the Omnipotent that the great through traffic of the world be side-tracked in order to give his local train the right of way.

(2) The other objection is to the effect that if God is wise and good, He will do what is best for us, and for every one, without our asking—indeed, to ask Him for anything implies a certain solicitude as to His appropriate action. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Then why should we ask? It is an impertinence in that it calls upon Him to change His line of action in obedience to our suggestion. All the lesser questions which arise are really comprehended within these two fundamental ones.

In the present chapter we shall deal with the first of these objections to prayer, the objection that arises from the idea of the uniformity of nature. Let us see (1) whether physical and spiritual things may be separated, so that even if we may no longer pray for the former we may still pray for the latter; (2) what is to be understood by "law" as applied to nature, and whether it can properly be said to be immutable; (3) how the matter stands when we regard the laws of nature as the outcome of a personal mind.

I.

The Physical and the Spiritual.

The great modern argument from physical science against prayer is this: We everywhere find the reign of law, *i.e.* God, if

there be a God, rules the universe and the affairs of men in certain fixed and invariable modes: how then can we hope, or wish, that He should violate these laws, which ensure the general welfare, in order to show special favour to this man or that, to supply his want, or to gratify his desire? Time was when it was pardonable that men should pray for rain or for fair weather, for health or abundant harvests; but it is no longer rational of them, now that the scientific idea of law has been proclaimed. We know that rain is the product of atmospheric laws which, under certain conditions, render it inevitable. We know that health or disease is the result of physiological laws, which absolutely determine that one man shall live and another die. The idea that rain and death are dependent on the will of a Being who can avert or precipitate them at His pleasure is therefore utterly unscientific and irrational; it belongs to the days when broad margins of human life and thought lay in a gross darkness, peopled by the popular imagination with the caprices of an omnipotent Will; just as in the ancient maps large unknown tracts of the earth were depicted as the haunts of chimeras dire and monstrous forms of life. But now, darkness has given place to light, the monstrous to the natural, caprice to law, confusion to order; and we can no longer believe that, by our prayers, we change that perfect Will which works out the welfare of the universe by methods as fixed and invariable as itself.

¶ That nature is governed by fixed laws; that effects flow from causes, that the order of the Divine work is visible, not only, as the ancients might have supposed, in the movements of the heavenly bodies, but also in the least things and the things which appear to be the most capricious ("even the very hairs of your head are all numbered")—this is a very great lesson which is being taught us daily and hourly by the commonest observation, as well as by the latest results of science. Everywhere, as far as we can see or observe or decompose the world around us, the pressure of law is discernible. And even if there are some things which we cannot see, which are too subtle to be reached by the eye of man or the use of instruments, still we are right in supposing that the empire of law does not cease with them, but that, in the invisible corners of nature, as they may be termed, the same powers rule, giving order and arrangement to the least things as well as the greatest.[1]

[1] Benjamin Jowett, *Sermons on Faith and Doctrine*, 267.

1. The three men in the nineteenth century who have written most profoundly upon the subject of prayer—Schleiermacher, F. W. Robertson, and Martineau—were never able to overcome absolutely the scientific hindrance to an adequate treatment of their theme. They divided the world of reality into two great departments or realms—the realm of external, physical nature, in which inviolable necessity rules, and the realm of the soul, the home of freedom and spontaneity. As Martineau puts it: "The physical is governed from without; the spiritual can govern itself. The former is subject to the same fixed laws that prevail in other parts of the organized world. The latter is a centre of individual power which issues its own determinations. No act of will can protect the body amidst present pestilence, but holy resolution will fortify the soul against temptation."

The assumption is that spiritual forces and mind constitute one realm, and mechanical forces and matter another, the deduction being that prayer, as belonging to the former sphere, is altogether out of touch with the domain of physical causation. But does the division thus postulated really exist? The hand, as it writes, is performing certain physical movements, but they are the consequent of a spiritual antecedent, and the hand is but serving as the instrument of the mind. Indeed, the connexion there is so immediate to consciousness, and the subservience of matter to mind so direct and instantaneous, that from it there has been derived the very notion of cause which science applies with such fruitfulness in its explanation of natural phenomena.

¶ Of all the idle distinctions that ever have been drawn in any controversy, the idlest of all is this which tells us we may ask for things spiritual because they may and can be given, but we must not ask for things in the natural world because they cannot be given; that we may pray for good dispositions, but that it is a folly to ask for good weather; that God may interfere in the one but not in the other. Surely this is utterly illogical; surely if there be law anywhere there is law everywhere.[1]

2. The exclusion of the operation of prayer from the physical world is based on the idea that, in asking God to grant us a physical benefit, we ask Him to perform a miracle. But this is equally true if the benefit asked for be spiritual. There, as here,

[1] Archbishop W. C. Magee, *Christ the Light of all Scripture*, 196.

we ask for the exertion of a power transcending, not only in degree but in kind, the power of man. There, as here, we ask for an action possessing the distinctive character of a miracle, namely, a volition followed by an immediate external result. The truth is, that to ask God to act at all and to ask Him to perform a miracle are one and the same thing. Every real answer to prayer is miraculous. Every such answer disturbs the normal operation of existing laws, whether by procuring the intervention of a higher law, or otherwise. Or, to speak more accurately, every such answer involves a certain departure from what, as we presume, would otherwise have been God's mode of working, who works everywhere in the physical as in the moral world. The difference between a resurrection from the dead at a prophet's prayer and the increase of clear-sightedness or of love through an infusion of grace in the soul of a cottager is a difference of degree. It is not a difference of kind. Each result is the product of a Divine interference with the normal course of things. And if this is the case, the distinction between what we think great and striking answers to prayer, because they impress our human imaginations so powerfully, and ordinary answers does not exist for Him to whose intelligence the least among created things are as the greatest, before whom all that He has made is in the aggregate so infinitely little.

¶ I noticed a lengthy discussion in the newspapers a month or two ago, on the propriety of praying for or against rain. It had suddenly, it seems, occurred to the public mind, and to that of the gentlemen who write the theology of the breakfast table, that rain was owing to natural causes; and that it must be unreasonable to expect God to supply on our immediate demand what could not be provided but by previous evaporation. I noticed further that this alarming difficulty was at least softened to some of our Metropolitan congregations by the assurances of their ministers that, although, since the last lecture by Professor Tyndall at the Royal Institution, it had become impossible to think of asking God for any temporal blessing, they might still hope their applications for spiritual advantages would occasionally be successful—thus implying that though material processes were necessarily slow, and the laws of Heaven respecting matter inviolable, mental processes might be instantaneous, and mental laws at any moment disregarded by their Institutor: so that the spirit of a man might be brought to maturity in a moment, though the resources of Omnipotence would be overtaxed, or its

consistency abandoned, in the endeavour to produce the same result on a greengage.[1]

¶ The position we have been led to take up is not that the Spiritual Laws are analogous to the Natural Laws, but that *they are the same Laws.* It is not a question of analogy but of *Identity.* The Natural Laws are not the shadows or images of the Spiritual in the same sense as autumn is emblematical of Decay, or the falling leaf of Death. The Natural Laws, as the Law of Continuity might well warn us, do not stop with the visible and then give place to a new set of Laws bearing a strong similitude to them. The Laws of the invisible are the same Laws, projections of the natural not supernatural. Analogous Phenomena are not the fruit of parallel Laws, but of the same Laws—Laws which at one end, as it were, may be dealing with Matter, at the other end with Spirit.[2]

II.

The Meaning of Law.

But now let us understand what is meant by a law of nature. Naturally, and indeed unavoidably, we employ such terms as order, constitution, arrangement, when we attempt to describe the world, the cosmos, the universe. And when we are pressed to explain what is implied in these terms we fall back upon a single term—Law. Law is the underlying and unifying principle. It is by conformity with law that a settled order is rendered possible.

1. Taken in the strictest sense of the word, the principle of law is this—that the same system of antecedents will always, and everywhere, be followed by the same consequent. Expressed in more popular language, it declares that the same cause is always and everywhere followed by the same effect. The change of time or place, if it leave the antecedents unchanged, leaves the consequent unchanged also. This is the principle of law in its strictest sense.

A law of nature, then, is an assertion that, as far as experience

[1] Ruskin, *The Nature and Authority of Miracle* (*Works*, xxxiv. 115).
[2] H. Drummond, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World.*

goes, certain facts always have followed certain other facts, and that our experience is so great as to justify us in inferring that the sequence will always continue. To the facts that have invariably preceded we give the name of causes; to those that have invariably followed we give the name of effects. We sometimes talk loosely, as though one set of facts explained or created another. Finding also that this invariable sequence is apparently, in many cases, not to be disturbed by human efforts, and that, in such cases, when it comes into collision with human will, it constrains obedience, we give to this sequence the name of Necessity. The name is but a name. It merely represents a personification of the unpleasing side of invariability. Nor can we strictly say that causes produce or explain effects. What we call the causes teach us when to expect and how to bring about what we call the effects; but there is no creation or explanation. A stone unsupported in the air falls to the ground: explain that. Why does it fall? It may be replied that its fall is explained by the law of gravitation, which asserts that every particle of matter attracts every other particle. But what is this law of gravitation except a reassertion of the original fact, viz., that the stone moves to the earth, including, besides, an assertion of many other similar facts which have led us to leap beyond our facts to a general assertion of invariability? For all purposes of explaining the stone's fall, to talk about the law of gravitation is as useless as it would be to try to explain the death of a man by saying that all animate beings are mortal. We cannot fully explain, in the strictest sense of the word, any part of any process in the universe. All that we can do is, when we find an unusually vast gap between effect and cause, to fill up the gap by bringing to light unnoticed links of phenomena, themselves both effects and causes; thus we complete the chain to our satisfaction by assimilating the sequence of cause and effect to those ordinary sequences of nature which we call natural because we are accustomed to them. And when we have done all we can, we can say no more than this, that the sequence now resembles our ordinary experience of sequences. But as for the ultimate cause or creating source of any action, that gap has never yet been filled up, nor has any explanation been given of it. The sceptic must fall back upon the unknown and unknowable; the Atheist must say, "It is, because it is"; the

theist, "It is, because God wills". Upon the will of God, then, we must say, if we believe in a God, depends every part of every invariable process in the universe.

2. Accordingly, when we speak of a law of nature the question is: Are we thinking of some self-sustained invisible force, of which we can give no account except that here it is a matter of experience? Or do we mean by a law of nature only a principle which, as our observation shows us, appears to govern particular actions of the Almighty Agent who made and who upholds the universe? If the former, let us frankly admit that we have not merely fettered God's freedom; we have, alas! ceased to believe in Him. For such self-sustained force is either self-originating, in which case there is no Being in existence who has made all that constituted this universe; or otherwise, having derived its first impact from the creative will of God, this force has subsequently escaped altogether from His control, so that it now fetters His liberty; and, in this case, there is no Being in existence who is almighty, in the sense of being really Master of this universe. If, however, we mean by law the observed regularity with which God works in nature as in grace, then in our contact with law we are dealing, not with a brutal, unintelligent, unconquerable force, but with the free will of an intelligent and moral Artist, who works, in His perfect freedom, with sustained and beautiful symmetry. Where is the absurdity of asking Him to hold His hand, or to hasten His work? He to whom we pray may be trusted to grant or to refuse a prayer, as may seem best to the highest wisdom and the truest love. And if He grant it, He is not without resources, even although we should have asked Him to suspend what we call a natural law. Can He not then provide for the freedom of His action without violating its order? Can He not supersede a lower rule of working by the intervention of a higher? If He really works at all; if something that is neither moral nor intelligent has not usurped His throne, it is certain that "the thing that is done upon earth He doeth it Himself," and that it is therefore as consistent with reason as with reverence to treat Him as being a free Agent, who is not really tied and bound by the intellectual abstractions with which finite intellects would fain destroy the freedom of His action.

¶ If God is a person, and we cannot think of Him as less, it is absurd to suppose that He is unaffected or uninfluenced by our petitions. This at once disposes of the purely subjective doctrine of prayer, and the objection raised on the ground of a fixed and unalterable order. There can be no personal relation without reciprocal action, and it is useless to argue that God is untouched or unmoved by the supplications of those to whom He is related by the bonds of love and mutual affection. To say that God can only act in harmony with His own law and in accordance with His own mode of action is to deny the freedom that we ourselves possess to the great Personality of which we are the faint and imperfect copies. It is to raise abstract law and order above God Himself, and to place Him under a lower category of thought than His own being. It is not to honour God to think of Him as working His will through all obstacles, regardless of and indifferent to the disposition and the co-operation of His creatures, driven by resistless laws, and incapable of intervention in the order that He has once established. On the other hand, the power of self-limitation and the disposition to determine His own action in accord with the choice of the free beings that He has created argues for the greatness of the love that stoops to ask for loving service and co-operation.[1]

3. Does the introduction of God violate the law? It is no violation of the principle of law to assert that the introduction of a volition into one of two identical conditions of the human body determines a totally different result. There is a movement in the one case; there is none in the other; but the principle of law remains inviolate. So, too, it is no violation of the principle of law to suppose that the introduction of a Divine volition into one of two identical systems of antecedents should determine a wholly different consequent; and it is this, and nothing else, that is asserted by the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer. It is not asserted that, as a result of prayer, a different consequent follows from the same system of antecedents; but it is asserted that, as a result of prayer, a new antecedent appears, and that thus the consequent is changed. Whether this is really so is another question, but it certainly may be so without any violation of the principle of law.

¶ If we see in the responsible agent back of all the workings of nature God Himself, then what are these various modes of

[1] J. G. James, *The Prayer Life*, 73.

action which are so regular and so immutable, and which we call Law, but expressions of God's own will? Law is the expression of God's will. It is the way God decides that force shall act upon matter. In itself it has no existence; it is simply our name for expressing God's mode of working. It is the way God does things. The only thing science can say is, certain effects follow certain causes *because they do:* the Christian says they do *because God provides for their so doing.* In other words, "the thing that is done upon earth he doeth it himself". Since this is true, where is the folly of asking God to control the forces of either the natural or spiritual world for the benefit of His trusting, praying children? Surely God would leave room for the freedom of His will without necessarily violating the order He established. More than this, who will dare say that God cannot, if He choose, without disaster, modify, suspend, or even change what we call a law? But to answer prayer no such heroic measures are necessary. Every result which even man produces is brought about by the combination and adjustment of forces existent about him. Science has proven beyond a shadow of doubt that every force in the world is wholly inoperative unless certain conditions are fulfilled, and that when these conditions are fulfilled that force begins to work its wonders. Shall the creature be privileged thus to utilize the forces which he found here at his coming and the like prerogative be denied the Creator who brought them into existence? Has man any good reason for believing that his will is more closely linked with these things than is the will of God?[1]

III.

Mind and Will in Natural Law.

Nothing enters into the meaning of law which could make it in the least degree unnatural to regard law as the outcome of mind and the expression of personal will. Nay more, it is allowed that, for the vast majority of those who have entertained it, the thought of law has carried with it, avowedly or tacitly, the thought of a lawgiver. Has the case been altered by any modification which the idea of law has undergone through the influence of modern science? It is often popularly supposed that it has. This has been largely the result of a loose and unguarded manner of speaking. We very commonly hear the expressions "governed

[1] W. E. Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?* 93.

by law," and "reign of law". Such expressions, vivid and picturesque as they are, cannot be defended when accurate thinking is in question. They may become seriously misleading. Years ago Dr. W. B. Carpenter challenged the propriety of the first of them, and urged that what was intended would be more satisfactorily conveyed by saying, "governed according to law". Law is not an entity in itself, nor is it a force which we have any right to invest with the attributes of personality. It is simply a principle of arrangement, a method of procedure. "Law," said Prof. Huxley, "means a rule which we have always found to hold good, and which we expect always will hold good." Law of itself can have no governing power. At the most its existence can suggest, or imply, a personality behind it. Law is not a being; it is an abstraction. It is a term for expressing the uniformity of the sequences of nature. Law is another name for invariable succession. Fire, brought into contact with a certain class of material things, burns—not once or twice, but always. The conditions being the same, the same effect follows. This, we say, is a law. But Theism holds not only that law is no agent, but that agency, so far as it belongs to objects in nature, is dependent upon, and either immediately or ultimately derived from, the Creator and Preserver of nature. Law signifies His plan of acting, or the plan which the living God ordains for the action of the forces of matter.

¶ Observe the terms on which our inner personality lives with what we call the inexorable physical laws. While recognizing them at every point, it knows itself as not of them, as more than they. They are the rules of the game, but they do not play the game. It is we who do that. When I rise to cross the room, my bones and muscles will obey all the laws of motion. But it is not the laws of motion that send me across the room; but my thought and will which use them, but are not they. We move freely in a bound universe. That is the miracle, *we* are the miracle. And it is to this region of the spirit, of personality, that prayer belongs. It supposes a kingdom of the spiritual stretching beyond our ken, just as does the kingdom of the physical. They both begin here, with us, and both stretch beyond us. There are millions of freely-acting spirits on this earth, clothed as we are with bodies. Why should we suppose we exhaust the spirituality of the universe? It is an inevitable

inference from what goes on around us that behind the physical infinite is a spiritual infinite.[1]

1. It has to be remembered that we are all of us perpetually interfering—no weaker word can be substituted—with the physical order about us. "What is it," asks Romanes, "that most distinguishes human intelligence in its relation to Natural Law? Most assuredly its utilizing ability—its power to direct the natural forces to the accomplishment of special ends. . . . The mind of man, considered thus as a natural cause, is certainly of all single natural causes the most influential; not, of course, in respect of the magnitude of its effects, but in respect of their number and diversity."[2] Human purpose and volition are perpetually playing into the system of law, thereby realizing a multitude of effects which the system, left to itself, would never produce, yet in such a way that no law is broken. Natural law of itself would never do any of the things which men are doing by means of it. The work of the world is done by natural forces under human guidance. It is the outcome at once of law and of purpose.

The phenomena of will are no less real than those of chemistry or mechanics, and we are no less bound to take them into account, when we are discussing such a question as the present. But whatever some may say, few things are more certain than that the phenomena of will—and especially the moral acts which depend for their character upon the responsible exercise of will—are strangely at variance with the idea of changeless law. Here, in the midst of a universe in which so much seems to tell of the resistless march of triumphant law, is a whole region of facts the very first idea of which is the idea of *freedom from law*. No amount of argument will persuade a sane man that he is talking nonsense when he says, "I can take the right-hand road or the left, as I please"; "I can give this money to this cause, or I can refuse"; "I can speak, or I can be silent". You may tell him each separate act is only the necessary result of a combination of previous forces, or of the force at the moment strongest, and that his actions always follow the line of least

[1] J. Brierley, *Life and the Ideal*, 71.

[2] G. J. Romanes, *Christian Prayer and General Laws*, 161.

resistance; but he is none the less sure that he is a free agent, with a mysterious power of will through which he acts. Therefore at once we find at least one class of facts over which law seems to exercise at most a very limited control.

We cannot alter a law of nature. The law is not that which acts or produces any result. The law is only the expression of the method in which the various forces around us operate. We cannot alter a law, but we can alter the operation of the force which is regulated by law. Thus it is a law of nature that by the force of gravitation a stone should lie motionless on the ground. By my will I take up the stone, I throw it up, bringing to bear on it other forces sufficient to overcome for the time the action of the force of gravitation. I catch the stone as it descends, again by my will applying another force to correct the action of the force of gravitation. We can all think of a thousand examples. Why, all our wonderful inventions, the steam-engine, the hydraulic press, the electric telegraph, are nothing else but the Will of man restraining, combining, directing, and utilizing the law-observing forces of nature. Thus we have not only a vast group of facts apparently ungoverned by general laws, but a constant interference with the operation of those general laws by that force which originates this group of facts, namely, the will.

¶ Mankind was never meant to be the slave of laws, but their master; human spirit was destined to rule over the rest of God's creation, with nature as its servant, laws and ordinances as its willing and able instruments. To turn these into the warders of its prison is an anomaly. The religiously scientific mind, while doing full justice to the all-pervading presence and power of law, is coming, increasingly, to realize that law was not meant to limit and fetter personality, but was made subject to it; that God made human personality in the likeness of His own, and therefore so constituted it that it is able to manipulate and administer laws like Himself, with this infinite difference that He is omnipotent and omniscient, and it is but a babe in these attributes—a learner, at the first stages of acquiring knowledge. Taught by God, man learns how one law can counteract, supersede, or modify another without confusion or collision. The laws of God, natural and spiritual, when rightly understood, are the friends and not the foes of personality. So diverse are they in their working, so wondrously adapted to further every beneficial purpose, that in

the execution of any scheme that is good and wise, far from desiring to set them aside, we would call them to our aid if we had but eyes to see. Man need never be baffled by the operation of God's laws.[1]

2. As a matter of fact, then, we can and do interfere with the forces of nature; and by our interference we achieve results which, before experience, might have seemed improbable enough. What we can do, with our limited knowledge and power, could, we must suppose, be done on a much vaster scale by one who was vastly superior in these respects. Indeed it would be the height of rashness to attempt to set any bounds to what would be possible in such a case. The key to the solution of the mystery of answer to prayer lies thus in our own possession of moral freedom. The all but universal experience of humanity is that within limitations we have some power of self-direction, some power of control, over our own destinies. We praise and blame ourselves or other people according to the way in which that power is exercised. But this moral freedom introduces into the universe a certain element of uncertainty. Within the illimitable scope of God's almighty purposes there is room for man's personal initiative. But if the reality of moral freedom is conceded, the possibility of answer to prayer must be conceded too.

¶ Our consciousness is essentially a self-directing creative consciousness. Under its directivity, our existence is an unbroken process of self-adaptation to an equally unbroken process of change in a surrounding environment with which our own existence is continuous as a part is akin to its whole. In this process of conscious self-change, each moment swallows up and yet retains all the preceding moments in a fuller form of existence by a veritable act of creation. This creation, or invention, is not caused by the sum-total of preceding acts, though it rests on them and re-fashions them. Our existence, directed by consciousness, is a sort of self-rolling snowball determining its own direction according to the new exigencies of each moment. . . . No two moments of our real life can ever be perfectly alike. However conditioned by preceding results, each fresh moment of that life imports a new element of creative invention which gives to the whole moment a character of originality which no human knowledge of the antecedents, however infinite, could possibly foresee.[2]

[1] L. Swetenham, *Conquering Prayer*, 148.
[2] H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution.*

3. What is true of man is no less true of God. Put it the other way. What is true of prayer in relation to God is equally true of it in relation to man. If the Divine will cannot be affected by prayer, no more can the human. If it is wrong to ask a boon of the Most High God, so is it to ask a boon of a father or a brother, of a mother or a sister, or of a friend. Human nature, as philosophy conceives it, no less than the Divine nature, is fast locked in the vice of necessity; there is not, nor can there ever be, any escape from it. If, then, you deny to human souls the infinite privilege of praying to their Father in Heaven for help in their sore need, you must logically refrain yourself from asking help in any form or under any condition from any son of earth. The prayer of a child to his father on earth is precisely as reasonable or unreasonable as the prayer of a man to God. But who will own that such a prayer can lack the element of reason or right? Who will admit that, when he tries to prevail by his petition upon the heart of a kinsman or friend in whose love he confides, such an act is immoral or illogical? No; it is impossible; human nature is too strong for philosophy. And as Dr. Johnson said of the freedom of the will, "We know our will is free, and there's an end on't," so we may say, "We know that human hearts are moved by prayer, and no argument will convince us that they are not". But from human hearts the ascent is natural to the Divine heart. For our Lord Himself drew the parallel between Divine and human parentage, saying: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? . . . If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

The uniformity of nature, so far as we have discerned it, is nothing but the expression of the stability of God's good pleasure. The sun rises every morning, and we shall not be warm without it. It is the signal of the sure mercies of God, sure in their recurrence, but merciful in their freedom. . . . The very work of man in this world is to answer to the signal; to know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. It is to know the reality of God's controlling power and the clearness of His manifestations within our own flesh, and man ought to come to know this by

what he knows of his own limited self-determination. He ought to look up with joy and reverence to God and adore in Him a great reality, which answers to that small but real spark of freedom which He has planted in us, and which makes the possibility of virtue and of honour.

¶ You remember the old image of the mice in the piano. It is an image invented by Dr. W. G. Ward, "Ideal" Ward, one of the men of the Oxford Movement. The image is this:

We begin, then, with imagining two mice, endowed, however, with quasi-human or semi-human intelligence, enclosed within a grand pianoforte, but prevented in some way or other from interfering with the free play of its machinery. From time to time they are delighted with the strains of choice music. One of the two considers these to result from some agency external to the instrument; but the other, having a more philosophical mind, rises to the conception of fixed laws and phenomenal uniformity. "Science as yet," he says, "is but in its infancy, but I have already made one or two important discoveries. Every sound which reaches us is preceded by a certain vibration of these strings. The same string invariably produces the same sound, and that louder or more gentle according as the vibration may be more or less intense. Sounds of a more composite character result when two or more of the strings vibrate together; and here, again, the sound produced, as far as I am able to discover, is precisely a compound of those sounds which have resulted from the various component strings vibrating separately. Then there is a further sequence which I have observed; for each vibration is preceded by a stroke from a corresponding hammer, and the string vibrates more intensely in proportion as the hammer's stroke is more forcible. Thus far I have already prosecuted my researches. And so much at least is evident even now, viz. that the sounds proceed not from any external and arbitrary agency—from the intervention, *e.g.*, of any higher will—but from the uniform operation of fixed laws. These laws may be explored by intelligent mice, and to their exploration I shall devote my life."[1]

¶ Can the humble request of believing lips restrain, accelerate, change the settled order of events? Can prayer make things that are not to be as though they were? Are events, in short, brought about through prayer that would not otherwise take place? Yes, a thousand times yes! To believe anything short of this is to take the soul out of every text that refers to prayer, is

[1] *William George Ward and the Catholic Revival*, 289.

to do away with the force of every scriptural illustration that bears upon it—to believe anything short of this is to believe that God has placed a mighty engine in the hands of His creature, but one that will not work, useful only as a scientific toy might be that helps to bring out a child's faculties, valuable only as a means of training the soul to commune with God. Yet what so easy for the unbeliever as to cavil at prayer; what so easy even for the Christian as to fail and falter in this region, and to stop short of the fulness of this, God's own Land of Promise, through unbelief? The commonplace objection to prayer, founded upon the supposed immutability of the laws by which God governs the world, is easily met and answered by the fact that prayer is itself one of these laws, upon whose working God has determined that a certain result shall follow:

> An element
> That comes and goes unseen, yet doth effect
> Rare issues by its operance.[1]

[1] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 135.

XII.

Philosophical Objections to Prayer.

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PHILOSOPHICAL OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER.

1. IN passing from the objections to prayer made from the side of science to those which are of a more philosophical or theological character, let us see how the doctrine of prayer is modified, or may yet be modified, by the growing study of psychology. Modern psychology is changing all the old landmarks of that science. Two facts are gaining prominence. One concerns the direct influence of mind on mind. Amidst all the clashing of opinions as to the exact value of so-called spiritualistic phenomena, it is important to remember that scientific belief is steadily veering towards an acceptance of many facts proving the transference of thoughts in hitherto unrecognized ways. Such distinguished scientists as Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge accept the facts of telepathy very decidedly. At the least, it may be conceded by all that mind-transferences are not so dependent upon material organs as we imagined. In physical science the amazing discovery has been made that electrical energy can be transmitted over vast distances without any connecting wires. A precisely similar advance is being made in psychical science. Wireless telegraphy is possible in the mental sphere as well as in the material world.

The other fact is the existence of sub-consciousness in the individual. Very little is known with certainty about this dim region. But it is quite clear that the roadway of our thoughts is built upon arches. The goods that are carried along that elevated road are then stored under the arches; and they may be brought up again on any day. Our mental life has its horizon, where the sky of our impressions seems to meet the ocean of our consciousness; but thoughts that sink beneath the horizon are no more extinguished than the sun is when it sets in the west, and, like it, they will rise again into view. Now, it is highly probable that this sub-conscious region is capable of receiving impressions that do not appeal to our conscious life. Tints that

awaken no sensation in the eye, tones that lie beyond the dull hearing of the ear, may find a responsive faculty in this mysterious region of being. The sub-conscious area or state may be likened to the receiving instrument for Marconigrams. It may be sensitive to suggestions sent out by other minds, and may interpret them for consciousness.

Do not these two facts offer a strictly scientific basis for a doctrine of intercessory prayer? He who prays may be radiating forth from himself waves of mental energy highly charged with ethical significance. He for whom prayer is made may receive these ripples, whether consciously or unconsciously, and will be influenced by their moral message. A Christian does not need any such theory to urge him to pray for others. But the hints which psychical science is throwing out so rapidly are an encouragement to those who sympathize with Tennyson's desire—

> Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell;
> That mind and soul, according well,
> May make one music as before,
> But vaster.

2. There are other ways in which the study of psychology is throwing light on the problems of prayer. Thus it is a fact of experience that to pray against certain sins to which we have rendered ourselves liable is to strengthen them; and that for the reason that prayer against them is directing attention to them, and to direct our attention to them is to find ourselves once more enjoying them, which is more than half the victory for the sin. This explains why some men sin in spite of their prayers. Delacroix, in describing the life of St. Teresa, says: "This state of division and war kept her tendencies in check, but also kept them alive". The continual struggle against sin keeps it active. Men fight their iniquities and their temptations hand to hand, and the more they do so the stronger the iniquities or the temptations become.

Psychology tells us to turn our eyes away from the sin. And with this the gospel agrees: "looking away unto Jesus". The only effective inhibition of any inward evil is to turn the attention

not on the evil we mean to flee but on the life we mean to attain. Forgetting the things which are behind, we press towards the mark of our high calling. And we forget, not by trying to forget, but by setting our mind on the goal. We do not first die to sin in order that we may thereafter live to God; we live to God, and so die to sin.

¶ In my boyhood I was taken to see a famous quarry. Over what appeared to me a great gulf had been made a pathway one plank broad for wheel-barrows, and over that perilous path quarrymen were wheeling loads of earth. I asked how the thing was possible, and a quarryman explained that he was able to wheel the barrow without stumbling by fixing his eye on the farther goal. He did not ignore the gulf and the danger, certainly did not deny their existence; he was aware of them. It was because of their presence that he kept his eye fixed on the goal. But it was his concentrated attention on that that kept him safe.[1]

3. Coming now to the philosophical or theological difficulties which have been felt against prayer, we may begin with the practical objection that the self-reliant man finds no use for prayer; next touch the rather superficial objection that where interests differ prayer is an absurdity; then pass to the now nearly exploded but once formidable argument that man is too insignificant for God to attend to his prayers. When these three objections are shortly discussed, we shall still have to deal with the two great difficulties, that God's providence being already perfect cannot be deflected in any direction by the prayer of man, and that in any case God's will is unalterable.

I.

Our Self-Sufficiency.

"After all," we say, "do we not depend on our own efforts for being what we are, and for doing what we do?" Whatever God may see fit to do for us, our best form of prayer is work; it is the determination to secure what we want by personal efforts to get it. The indolent or the imaginative may be left to lengthen

[1] George Steven, *The Psychology of the Christian Soul*, 184.

out their litanies; but practical men will fall back upon the wise proverb that "God helps those who help themselves".

1. The first answer is that the supposed incompatibility of prayer with self-reliance is a good deal grounded on the belief that prayer is to be used alone. Of course, there have been fanatics—there are some in our own day—who will not, for instance, employ a physician in a child's sickness, lest they should be supposed to be trusting in other help than in God's answer to prayer. They might be asked, very pertinently, whether they carry out this principle in reference to seeking for food and clothing for themselves; whether prayer is the only means to which they resort for daily bread. But it would be ridiculous to found an argument against prayer on such a delusion. The truer maxim is "Ora et labora"—Pray, that your labour may be blessed; labour, lest your very prayer be an excuse for inactivity. If you value prayer do not let it be brought into disrepute by your sluggishness. No promise is given to those who neglect ordinary means. If you will not vaccinate your child, if you will not drain and ventilate your dwelling, if you will not attach lightning conductors to the tall chimneys of your factory, if you will not lay up provision for your old age, what will be the result? The unpraying, who in these practical matters have been, in their generation, wiser than yourself, will appear more prosperous than you who profess to have prayed. And not merely will your misfortunes obtain little sympathy, but prayer, through your abuse of it, will incur contempt. Remember those weighty, though quaint, words of Dr. Donne:—

> Hands are of double office; for the ground
> We till with them, and them to Heaven we raise:
> Who prayerless labours, or without this prays,
> Doth but one half, that's none.

¶ Nor are prayer and work connected by any arbitrary link, but as different aspects of the same man. "Ora et labora," writes Dr. Wichern in one of his pleasant papers, "is carved on a peasant's house in the Vierland. 'It must be French,' said a neighbour's wife, as I stood looking at the legend, but you know it just means:—

With this hand work, and with the other pray,
And God will bless them both from day to day."[1]

¶ One of the best-known pictures of the last half-century is Millet's "Angelus". The scene is a potato field, in the midst of which, and occupying the foreground of the picture, are two figures, a young man and a young woman. Against the distant sky-line is the steeple of a church. It is the evening hour, and as the bell rings which calls the villagers to worship, the workers in the field lay aside the implements of their toil and, with folded hands and bowed heads, stand for a moment in silent prayer. It is a picture of what every life should be, of what every life must be, which has taken as its pattern the Perfect Life in which work and prayer are blent like bells of sweet accord.[2]

2. In the second place there may be cases where labour ordinarily so-called is ineffectual. A ship is foundering, the boats have been dashed in pieces, the pumps are powerless, and no friendly vessel is nigh. Then prayer and labour are synonymous. The sinking crew can only pray for resignation and preparedness for their end. A child is at the point of death, all remedies have been tried—tried prayerfully, we will believe—in vain. Then, too, prayer and labour become most clearly synonymous. Nothing can be carried on but prayer that God will receive the departing soul, and comfort and sustain the bereaved survivors. And the following fact has been frequently noticed as a proof that prayer is a labour, is a bringing out of latent power into energy, is a means to some result: the most self-reliant persons, as they are called, in life, have bethought themselves in their dying hour of a hitherto unexercised part of self. To this effect spoke Wolsey:—

O Cromwell, Cromwell,
Had I but serv'd my God with half the zeal
I serv'd my king, He would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies.

Now, what is this but an acknowledgment that prayer had not been duly used hitherto?

Such is our weakness that we constantly tend to a one-sided use of God's gifts. We are either exclusively speculative and contemplative on the one hand, or we are absorbingly practical

[1] W. F. Stevenson, *Praying and Working*, 5.
[2] G. Jackson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, 151.

and men of action on the other. Either exaggeration is fatal to the true life of religion, which binds the soul to God by faith as well as by love; by love not less than by faith; by a life of energetic service not less truly than by a life of communion with light and truth. It is in prayer that each element is at once quickened in itself and balanced by the presence of the other. The great masters and teachers of Christian doctrine have always found in prayer their highest source of illumination. The greatest practical resolves that have enriched and beautified human life in Christian times have been arrived at in prayer, ever since the day when, at the most solemn service of the Apostolic Church, the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them".

¶ Mr. Blatchford says that he thinks that even if there be any benefit in prayer, "it is bought too dearly at the price of a decrease in our self-reliance. I do not think it is good for a man to be always asking for help, or for benefits, or for pardon. It seems to me that such a habit must tend to weaken character." Will, then, any doctor affirm that to breathe deeply in pure air, as a habit, is to weaken the lungs? If he will say Yes to that, we may accept such a statement as is here quoted. But never until then. Rather, to look at this notion carefully, but for a moment, is to see how misrepresenting it is. Indeed it is not only absurd in itself, but flatly contradictory to history, diametrically opposed to observation, utterly at variance with experience, and contradicted entirely by the writer himself. For what does he acknowledge? "The act of prayer gives courage and confidence in proportion to the faith of him who prays." When he prays "he is rousing up his dormant faculty of resistance and desire for righteousness". Is that weakening character? So far as we know anything of human nature and human life, surely that is the kind of influence upon character which, above all else, in modern England and indeed throughout Europe, this generation needs. And as to the past, what is the name of the strongest man in English history? Does any one hesitate? Surely not for more than two seconds. Is it not one to whom we owe our most glorious liberties, Oliver Cromwell? It may be questioned whether any stronger man is to be found in the whole history of civilization. But what do we read concerning him? I refer you to Green's *History of the English People*. Listen to what is there said about Cromwell: "Cromwell 'spent much time with God in prayer before the storm' of Basing House".

This, we know, was typical of his general procedure. And what about his men? "The regiment of a thousand men which Cromwell raised for the Association of the Eastern Counties, was formed strictly of 'men of religion'. 'A lovely company' he tells his friends with soldierly pride. No blasphemy, drinking, disorder, or impiety were suffered in their ranks."[1] Were they, then, weaklings? If one may discern the signs of the times, what is wanted more than ever in modern England on the side of truth and righteousness is a host of men as "weak" as Cromwell's Ironsides and their leader. For verily if these our valiant forefathers were made what they were by prayer, and you and I have the social as well as the spiritual weal of our land at heart, then I submit that on the testimony of history the very best thing we could do would be to turn all England into one vast assembly for genuine prayer. Prayer the weakener of character! Well, indeed, may we avow that such a thought is contrary alike to experience and to observation.[2]

¶ True prayer (if they complained and sought help either for themselves, or for their neighbours, and trusted in the promise of God) would so comfort the soul and courage the heart, that the body, though it were half dead and more, would revive and be lusty again, and the labour would be short and easy: as for an example; if thou were so oppressed that thou were weary of thy life, and wentest to the king for help, and haddest sped, thy spirits would so rejoice, that thy body would receive her strength again, and be as lusty as ever it was; even so the promises of God work joy above all measure, where they be believed in the heart.[3]

II.

The War of Interests.

1. To suppose that God can answer individual prayers for specific blessings is inconsistent, we are told, with any serious appreciation of human interests. One man or nation asks for that which may be an injury to another. The Spaniards prayed for the success of their Armada: the English prayed against it. Both could not be listened to. The weather cannot consult the convenience of everybody at once; and therefore the specific

[1] Green, *A Short History of the English People*, 554.
[2] F. Ballard, in *Is Christianity True?* 229.
[3] William Tindale, *Expositions and Notes* (ed. of 1849), 80.

prayers of well-meaning villagers, if they could be attended to, could be attended to only by a God who, instead of being the Father of all His creatures, reserved special indulgences for His favourites.

¶ Æsop was only a Pagan, yet he taught many truths in his homely fashion which Christians may profitably lay to heart. Here is one of his Fables: "A certain man had two daughters, and he married one to a gardener and the other to a potter. After a while he went to the gardener's wife and asked her how she was, and how they were thriving. She said they had everything, but there was one thing that they were praying for—rain to refresh the plants. By and by he visited the potter's wife, and asked her likewise how she was; and she said they had everything else that they needed, and there was only one thing that they were praying for—a continuance of fair weather and sunshine to dry the clay. 'If,' said he, 'you are seeking for fair weather and your sister for rain, which of you am I to join with in prayer?'"[1]

2. But every prayer for specific blessings in a Christian soul is tacitly, if not expressly, conditioned. The three conditions which are always understood are given at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer—"Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done". In effect these three conditions are only one. If a change of weather, or a restoration to health, or any blessing whatever be prayed for, a Christian petitioner deliberately wills that his prayer should be refused, supposing that to grant it should in any way obscure God's glory in other minds, or hinder the advance of His Kingdom, and so contravene what must be His will. Every Christian tacitly adds to every prayer, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done".

¶ Two sides are praying for victory—how can God answer both? Why, by bringing to pass what is right. There is only one will of God. The will of God is right, whatever it is, and there is one right. We do not know which the right is. We may be quite conscientiously fighting for what we think right, but as both sides pray to God, God answers with the right answer, which is best for both.[2]

[1] D. Smith, *Christian Counsel*, 201.
[2] Bishop Winnington Ingram, *The Call of the Father*, 74.

¶ The criterion of true prayer is that it should be the expression of nobleness in the man who prays. It is the spiritual nature reaching upward. Anything that falls below this level is not prayer. Agamemnon, in the Iliad, asks of Zeus that he may

> the haughty walls of Priam's house
> Lay prostrate in the dust; and burn with fire
> His lofty gates; and strip from Hector's breast
> His sword-rent tunic, while around his corpse
> Many brave comrades, prostrate, bite the dust.

While Achilles persuades his goddess-mother, Thetis, to intercede with the king of the gods that

> the routed Greeks
> Back to their ships with slaughter may be driven;
> That all may taste the folly of their king,
> And Agamemnon's haughty self may mourn
> The slight on Grecia's bravest warrior cast.

Here are two conflicting prayers. Zeus cannot honour both, and we feel that he ought not to honour either. They are not the expressions of nobleness in the men who prayed. They are no more than the natural desires of imperfect natures, yet they are petitions addressed to deity.[1]

> How we, poor players on Life's little stage,
> Thrust blindly at each other in our rage,
> Quarrel and fret, and rashly dare to pray
> To God to help us on our selfish way.
>
> We think to move Him with our prayer and praise,
> To serve our needs; as in the old Greek days
> Their gods came down and mingled in the fight
> With mightier arms the flying foe to smite.
>
> The laughter of those gods pealed down to men,
> For heaven was but earth's upper story then,
> Where goddesses about an apple strove,
> And the high gods fell humanly in love.
>
> We own a God whose presence fills the sky,—
> Whose sleepless eyes behold the worlds roll by;
> Shall not His memory number, one by one,
> The sons of men, who call them each His son?[2]

[1] R. J. Campbell, *A Faith for To-Day*, 310.
[2] Louise Chandler Moulton.

3. If God should think fit to grant a large proportion of the particular requests which would be found among the daily prayers of an earnest Christian, He would not, to say the least, thereby do any injury to others, whether they were Christians or not. Prayer for the highest well-being of any human being may be granted without damaging other human beings. If God should condescend in answer to prayer to teach one of His servants more humility, purity, or love, this would not oblige Him to withdraw spiritual graces from any others in order to do it. Nor are other persons the worse for coming into contact with one whom God has made loving, or pure, or humble, in answer to prayer. Is it not near the truth to say that they are likely to be much better, and therefore that a large number of answers to prayer for personal blessings necessarily extend in their effects beyond those who are immediately blessed?

¶ "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God" (Acts x. 4)—"Thy prayers and thine alms". What a singular combination! Are not these two contrary things? Is not prayer a desire to *get*; is not the offer of alms a desire to *give*? How can a man receive a monument for opposing qualities? My brother, these are *not* opposing qualities. All prayer must be a *giving* of something. You are not justified in making it a mere desire to *get*. When you are about to ask anything of your Father, you ought to pause for a moment. Before making a request to your Father, you should give your sympathy to your fellow-man; you should say—"How would the granting of this to *me* affect *him*? Let me remember *his* wants ere I satisfy my own!" That is what I understand our Lord to mean by the command—"When thou bringest thine offering to the altar and thou rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave thine offering unsurrendered; first be *reconciled* to thy brother!" When you come to the altar of worship to offer up your prayer, ask yourself first of all whether the granting of your wish would be against the interest of your neighbour; and if your heart says "Yes," do not present that prayer *to-day*. Leave it on the steps of the altar. Go back to secular life again. Seek a meeting with your neighbour. Adjust your respective claims. Try if his interest can be made compatible with yours. If it can, you may go forward to the altar once more. Your prayer will then be unsullied, pure. There will be nothing mean in it, nothing sordid, nothing self-seeking. It will be such a prayer

as you can present without shame in the presence of the ministrant angels, in the presence of redeeming Love.[1]

III.

What is Man?

1. A third argument directed against the efficacy of prayer seems, at first sight, to appeal to the humility which must ever be characteristic of the creature face to face with his Creator. It is the difficulty which, with deepest feeling, was expressed by the Psalmist when, in contemplation of the infinite vastness of the heavens, he was lost in wonder at the fact that so insignificant a being as man should be chosen by God as the object of His special regard:—

> "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
> The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained:
> What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
> And the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

In the original the contrast is even stronger than in the translation, for the words for "man" (*Enosh*, *Ben-adam*) are chosen to emphasize man's frailty, and mortality, and earthly origin, in contrast to the vast and apparently unchanging structure of the heavens. But the contrast deepens yet further as we realize that, to whatever period of Jewish history this psalm may belong, the writer's knowledge of the vastness of the creation, and of the nature of celestial phenomena, was almost as nothing in comparison with what we know of it. To us the revelation, through the telescope, of space which appears illimitable, through the microscope, of minuteness almost infinite, the discovery of forces close to us and around us, but, until recently, unsuspected and unemployed, gives to the ancient words of the Psalmist, when taken on our lips, a power and a pathos such as he would not have felt.

2. It is in writings such as the *Thoughts* of Blaise Pascal, or passages in the works of Cardinal Newman or Dean Church, that we are helped to break through the sway of custom and habit in regarding our position, and to enter into the wonder of

[1] G. Matheson, *Times of Retirement*, 242.

our apparent insignificance, and yet more of our true greatness. But the Psalmist, in his amazement at the Creator's "visitation" of man in constant, loving, providential regard, knew also the solution of the difficulty. The reason why man in bodily infirmity and insignificance, placed in a world which is almost a speck in comparison with the sun which governs our system, and yet more with hundreds and thousands of suns governing other systems, is the object of Divine care, is expressed in the words by which his own question is answered:—

"For thou hast made him but little lower than God,
And crownest him with glory and honour.
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands;
Thou hast put all things under his feet."

As a spirit conscious of his own existence, and determining his action in the freedom of his will, man is the "crown, and glory, and perfection of God's creation". If creation grows upon us, startling us with a sense of its vastness, we can in the very light of those great advances of scientific discovery and human control over our system discern the pledge of man's lofty destiny, and also the assurance that God will attend to his prayers and manifest His care.

3. And if we pass from the true conception of man to the thought of the Divine omniscience with which the Divine omnipotence is inseparably united, there is one further assurance that, while we cannot conceive how God can attend to each member of the human race, we can rationally believe that He does so. "To know well," writes Bishop Gore, "is to know both broadly and in detail. And to act well is to act with a wide grasp, and also an insight into each individual case." In education, the master whose skill, not only in imparting knowledge but in forming character, is the highest is the teacher who, like Arnold or Thring, holds in combination the government and guidance of the corporate society of the school with the knowledge of each class and of each boy in it. A Church ruler can be really great only when, in forming wide conceptions and plans, he is also alive to the details, and the training, in countless ways, of the persons needed for their realization. Great commanders such as Wellington, Napoleon, von Moltke, or Roberts, have held in combination the

plan of great campaigns with concentration of attention to smallest contingencies and details, and, in one case at least, to the welfare, moral, and spiritual, of the soldiers under their command. If that combination exists in the highest forms of human action, need we hesitate to believe that it also characterizes the all-sovereign action of God Himself? Not trustfully only, but also reasonably, we may say with the Psalmist:—

> "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem;
> He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel.
> He healeth the broken in heart,
> And bindeth up their wounds.
> He telleth the number of the stars;
> He giveth them all their names.
> Great is our Lord, and mighty in power;
> His understanding is infinite."

¶ A controversy on this difficulty took place in the *Hibbert Journal* recently. In an article on Prayer, Mr. Charles Stewart asked: "Can it rationally be supposed that the prayers, made daily and hourly by hundreds of millions of human beings of one religion and another, addressed to their deity, true or false, asking for all manner of things, wise and unwise, selfish and unselfish, can reach the ears of God, or that they deserve to do so, a very large proportion of them being merely formal, perfunctory, insincere, or misdirected? Considering the incalculable amount of weighing and sifting which these petitions must require, the wide and constant knowledge and observation of the bodily circumstances and mental conditions of each suppliant which must be presupposed in God if the petitions are to be dealt with judicially and fairly (and any other idea is incompatible with Divine justice), can it be conceived that God can give serious ear and individual consideration to each and all of them?"

Bishop D'Arcy replied: "Mr. Stewart seems to imagine that the amount of 'weighing and sifting which these petitions must require' is too complicated a problem for the Deity. He thinks it more probable that they are dealt with according to general laws. But surely this is an amazingly petty view of the Divine Nature. How infinitely worthier is the teaching that not a sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledge and care! It is more philosophical also. To imagine, as Mr. Stewart does, that God's interest in His universe is entirely concerned with general laws, is a deification of red tape. The truth is that, in

the actual world, reality is always concrete and individual. The law is a mere abstraction." [1]

¶ The avocations of God, however manifold, do not hinder Him in the least from bestowing as much attention upon this earth as if He had nothing else to attend to; and to suppose the contrary is to transfer to Him the ideas and attributes of a limited creature. If we judge from the fine balance which there is between the necessities of nature and the supplies of Providence—the rare occurrence of famine or starvation upon the earth, and the ample means of meeting these occurrences by prudent foresight and proper economy—from the adaptation of every creature to its abode, and of the productions of the region to its wants, and in general from God's being so ready even much beforehand with His gifts to man and beast, we shall, instead of concluding against a similar intercourse between the Creator and the creature in things religious, conclude that here also there should be a correspondence of want and of supply, of request and of gift. It is very well, therefore, for men who have made a few advances into the knowledge of the universe, to conjecture from its ample population that the Creator has not time to attend to our little wants, when it is the universal acknowledgment of the learned, that the least microscopic insect is as richly furnished with organic structures and beautiful adaptation to its birthplace and habitation, as if the Almighty had occupied His faculties upon that invisible creature alone.[2]

IV.

A Perfect Providence.

1. A more serious difficulty has now to be dealt with. If God knows all, and does all for the best, may we not trust to His guidance at least as much as we do to the guidance of men? And if "prayer moves the hand that guides the world," what are we that we should grasp at the rein in the hand of the skilful driver? But it may be said in answer, first of all, that prayer changes the conditions; God causes the grain in the field to grow and ripen, but man plants the field and chooses what kind of grain it shall bear. Petition is of three kinds: the prayer for spiritual blessings for ourselves, the prayer for spiritual blessings for others, and the prayer for material blessings, for ourselves or others.

[1] *The Hibbert Journal*, ix. 650.

[2] *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, iii. 3.

(1) The first kind of petition, the prayer for spiritual blessings for ourselves, we may recognize as distinctly a condition to the end desired; it is the opening of the heart, the natural method by which the gift may be received. From the point of view of the understanding, prayer must inevitably be its own answer, for when the heart is ready for good, good must enter as it were by a certain Divine necessity. But if we grant the truth of religion, this sort of petition and its fulfilment appear in a higher aspect. The response of spirit to spirit may indeed be as inevitable as any action and reaction in the natural world, but the method is different. Because the response is regular, it is not therefore mechanical. The spiritual acts voluntarily.

(2) The question is somewhat harder when we turn to the petition for spiritual blessings for others. God must know their needs; it is the human spirit, not the Divine, that requires to be prompted; and such petition is not obviously a condition of the fulfilment of that which is desired. Our truest spiritual life leads us to pray for others. We may explain this as justified simply by the effect which the intense thought and feeling of one person has upon another. But is there not more? Is it not true that as the mother gives utterance in prayer to her longing for her child's good, her heart is opened, so that the influence which she exerts upon the child becomes not merely that of her own desire and will, but also that of the Divine Presence itself? The bit of steel that is charged by a magnet becomes powerful to charge other bits of steel. In such petition what we have is not the human will making the Divine will follow its desire, but the Divine will making the human will its instrument.

¶ Certainly no one prays for anything unless he believes that it exists, and hopes to obtain it. But God wills that what He has promised should be asked of Him in prayer. And perhaps therefore He in the first place promises many things which He has resolved to give us, that our devotion may be excited by the promise: and that thus our earnest prayer may merit what He had been disposed to bestow upon us freely.[1]

(3) In the prayer for material blessings, whether for ourselves or for others, the connexion between the petition and the fulfilment is far less obvious. All the tests that have been suggested

[1] St. Bernard, *Works* (ed. Eales), iii. 345.

are very superficial. Thus Tyndall proposed, as a prayer-gauge by which the petition for material blessing should be submitted to scientific test, that two wards should be set apart in a hospital, in one of which the patients should be treated by physicians in the usual way, while in the other ward they should simply be prayed for. But Tyndall here fell into an error common with scientists when dealing with questions of religion or metaphysics. He did not recognize the spiritual nature of prayer, and failed to see that in this experiment that he proposed the conditions would be such that the prayer offered would not be prayer at all. It would not be the expression of personal desire, but the demand that God should display His power. The fact is that there is no test that can be applied. The question is not whether prayer is a good irrigator or fertilizer, but whether it is a real power. If a man believes that it is, then let him pray as he wishes, spontaneously and freely.

> Oft I think my prayers
> Are foolish, feeble things; for Christ is good
> Whether I pray or not . . . and then I stop
> And feel I can do nought towards helping men,
> Till out it comes, like tears that will not hold,
> And I must pray again for all the world.

2. No doubt it is the judgment of reason, as it is again the assurance of our Lord, that our Father knoweth what things we have need of, before we ask Him, and knows them a great deal better than we do. The object of prayer is not to inform God or to correct His methods—to drag down His wisdom to the level of our folly; the object of prayer is to educate us in intercourse with God. We are sons of God, capable of something better than mechanical obedience; capable of intelligent correspondence with our Father, capable of fellowship and communion with Him in one Spirit. There is to be what the New Testament calls "freedom of speech," and an open avenue of "inquiry towards God". That is our highest function; and that is the glory of our eternal occupation. To train us for it now, in the childhood of our immortal life, even though we babble with half-inarticulate sounds, we are to be practised to pray. We are to ask persistently and regularly, and according to the loving wisdom

of God, to receive in response to our prayers, and so to be educated into personal relations with God.

What if God knows prayer to be the thing we need first and most? What if the main object in His idea of prayer be the supplying of our great, our endless need—the need of Himself? What if the good of all our smaller and lower needs lies in this, that they help to drive us to God? Hunger may drive the runaway child home, and he may or may not be fed at once, but he needs his mother more than his dinner. Communion with God is the one need of the soul beyond all other needs; prayer is the beginning of that communion and some need is the motive of that prayer. Our wants are for the sake of our coming into communion with God, our eternal need. If gratitude and love immediately followed the supply of our needs, if God our Saviour were the one thought of our hearts, then it might be unnecessary that we should ask for anything we need. But seeing we take our supplies as a matter of course, feeling as if they came out of nothing, or from the earth, or our own thoughts, instead of out of a heart of love and a will which alone is force, it is needful that we should be made to feel some at least of our wants, that we may seek Him who alone supplies all of them, and find His every gift a window to His heart of truth. So begins a communion, a talking with God, a coming-to-one with Him, which is the sole end of prayer, and even of existence itself in its infinite phases. We must ask that we may receive; but that we should receive what we ask in respect of our lower needs is not God's end in making us pray, for He could give us everything without that. To bring His child to his knee, God withholds that man may ask.

¶ There are times in the life of every Christian when some great truth is clearly revealed to him, some long-locked door of promise left with the key hanging in the wards, only waiting to be turned by a prayer. At these times God is waiting to be gracious, and what He appears in many cases to wait for is the full consent and submission of the human will. Often, at such times, the Holy Spirit, instructed in the mind and will of God, will allure the soul into the direction where God intends to meet and bless it. The life will be drawn towards the attainment of some specific object, the heart will be enticed to covet earnestly

some peculiar grace; God will appear to invite the soul to pray for the especial gift He intends to bestow. "Yet for this thing," He says, speaking of some boon which He kept in store for His ancient Church, "will I be inquired of by them." God sometimes seems in His dealings with the world to wait till He has secured the co-operation of man's wish and will. "Pray," says our Lord Himself, "to the Lord of the harvest, that he may send forth labourers into his harvest." The harvest is God's, and it is He who must send the labourers; still man must pray. His great Father worketh not alone; He has need of man's voice, man's heart, man's energy, man's prayer.[1]

3. Experience and reason contradict the assertion that God's best gifts can be, and are, given to us apart from prayer. This is the inveterate fallacy in which man is regarded as a mechanism and not as a free moral and spiritual being. To the creation, in so far as it is mechanical, God gives its complete store of mechanical energy, as a matter of course. But to the human spirit God gives freedom, and in that freedom the power of appropriating more or less of the Divine benediction. God wills to give His best gifts to every man, but He is able to do so only in so far as man responds with the capacity of receiving them. Man's moral and spiritual relations with God are relations of freedom. The will of man in seeking must meet the will of God in giving. They that seek shall find. The Father who is in heaven gives "good things to them that ask him". It is both beautiful and true that God's best gifts come to man in answer to the prayer of faith.

¶ I believe all successful prayer to be a prompting from the Father. My prayer does not change His mind; it is His mind that *dictates* my prayer. Efficacious prayer is not so much a petition as a prophecy; it is my Father saying to me, "This is My will; ask *this*".[2]

I cannot think but God must know
About the thing I long for so;
I know He is so good, so kind,
I cannot think but He will find
Some way to help, some way to show
Me to the thing I long for so.

[1] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 143. [2] George Matheson, *Rests by the River*, 68.

I stretch my hand,—it lies so near:
It looks so sweet, it looks so dear.
"Dear Lord," I pray, "oh, let me know
If it is wrong to want it so".
He only smiles,—He does not speak;
My heart grows weaker and more weak,
With looking at the thing so dear.
Which lies so far and yet so near.

Now, Lord, I leave at Thy loved feet
This thing which looks so near, so sweet,
I will not seek, I will not long,—
I almost fear I have been wrong.
I'll go and work the harder, Lord,
And wait till by some loud, clear word
Thou callest me to Thy loved feet,
To take this thing, so dear, so sweet.[1]

4. The more we approximate to the prayer of faith, the more precise the answer which may be expected. And we may say that it is the prayer, or rather the spiritual state behind the prayer, that makes the answer possible. Take, for instance, the case of eager Christian men and women who pray for a revival of religion. After a season of earnest waiting upon God, a revival of religion comes. Apart from their prayer, it never could have come. For God works through right human media. They, by their prayer, were bringing themselves into that spiritual condition, which could form an avenue for the operations of the Holy Ghost. So they, praying, received from God, acting through themselves, that for which they prayed. Thus prayer benefits him who prays. It also, experience teaches us, benefits him who is prayed for. Very strangely sometimes, the prayer of a mother protects a lad that is far away. Men may remember occasions when they have felt themselves wondrously guarded from evil. It was as if some hand unseen was laid upon them to hold them back. That hand was the hand of God. Maybe, at the other end of the chain of causes was the silent prayer of a tender heart that loved much. It is reasonable to hold that prayer is answered, alongside of a belief in a changelessly wise and loving God. For earnest prayer is an indication of a changed situation in ourselves

[1] Saxe Holm.

which demands a changed experience from Him, who, with His wisdom and power, continually adjusts the universe to His own great ends.

¶ Jesus was convinced that abundant life, volitional, mental, and physical, proceeded from the Father's will always, toward all human creatures; that this flood of life, falling like sunshine, needed but the opening of the window in man's understanding, the will to estimate God aright, the will to pray, the will to believe. Man can only shut God out; when man's heart is open the influx of Divine life is sure according to the ever-active purpose of God.[1]

¶ "It's a strange thing," said Dinah Morris, "sometimes when I'm quite alone, sitting in my room with my eyes closed, or walking over the hills, the people I've seen and known, if it's only been for a few days, are brought before me, and I hear their voices and see them look and move almost plainer than I ever did when they were really with me so as I could touch them. And then my heart is drawn out towards them, and I feel their lot as if it was my own, and I take comfort in spreading it before the Lord and resting in His Love, on their behalf as well as my own."[2]

¶ When rector of Kilmoylan and Cummer, William Plunket was moved to devote himself to the cause of Irish Church Missions; and in a pamphlet that he wrote describing the work in West Connaught, he gives the following striking instance of the effect of continued intercessory prayer:—

"The owner of Clifden five-and-twenty years ago lived in a beautiful place adjoining the town, in a castle which overlooked the inlet of the Atlantic beside which Clifden is situated. He was a strictly upright, fearless, and amiable man, much beloved and respected by the people; but he was more: he was a pious and consistent Christian, and it grieved his soul, day by day, to see the fearful state of spiritual destitution in the midst of which he lived. At last he and his brother, a man of like spirit, adopted the only alternative which at the time seemed open to them; they resolved to pray. Five-and-twenty years ago, upon a Friday evening, they with three or four friends established a weekly prayer-meeting. That weekly prayer-meeting has never been discontinued. For ten or twelve years the prayers of those few suppliants went up to God, entreating Him to pour down a blessing upon the surrounding neighbourhood; and yet no answer

[1] *Christus Futurus*, 60. [2] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*.

seemed to come. In God's good time, however, the little cloud was seen; by degrees the heavens became full of impending blessings, and at last the shower descended. And now in that same district of West Galway, where five-and-twenty years ago there was but this one small church, with its twenty or thirty worshippers, there are now no less than twenty-five congregations, ten of which meet in churches; and one of these is the large new church of Clifden, in which every Sunday there is a congregation of about three hundred worshippers".[1]

V.

The Unchangeable Will.

The last of the philosophical arguments against prayer is that prayer is inconsistent with the truth that all which comes to pass is predetermined in the predestination of God. Unless the will of God could have been, or could be, other than it is, what room is there for the effect of prayer?

1. The objection carries us into the old controversy between the defenders of the Divine foreknowledge and Divine sovereignty on the one hand, and the defenders of the freedom of the human will on the other. With the comprehensive breadth characteristic of perfect truth, the reality of both, alike in the Old Testament and in the New, is assumed. Simply from the fact of that breadth of treatment, men might indeed have learned that, in our own acceptance of both these facts, there was nothing to harmonize, because between the two there is, in reality, no conflict, and many a subtle intellect might have saved itself much painful effort and disappointment. On the one side, the house of Israel is "as the clay in the potter's hand"; on the other, "at what instant" God "shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom," His attitude towards it is contingent on the nation "turning from their evil," or "doing evil in his sight".

If we cannot reconcile the two facts of eternal predestination and of the power of prayer, we must not for that reason overlook either. On the one hand, we shall become heartless and hopeless unless we firmly believe that "through the ages one increasing purpose runs," a purpose which will work itself out independently

[1] F. D. How, *Archbishop Plunket. A Memoir*, 45.

of us, a purpose of love which has in long ages past settled what shall take place, and to what it will lead. And, on the other hand, we shall become lifeless and formal atheists unless we allow that our prayers can and do have an effect in the world, that events are moulded according to our requests, that God does hear and answer the supplications of His people.

2. Wherever a moral government of the world is acknowledged, it must be likewise acknowledged that the Divine purpose is no fate, no inflexible allotment, but a purpose which in its execution is conditioned by the free actions of men, a pre-supposition without which the conceptions of imputation and responsibility, of being lost and saved, of judgment and mercy, of faith and conversion, would be without all sense and meaning. But of the human actions, the free acts of men, by which the Divine purpose is self-conditioned, and which it has ordained as conditions for the development of God's Kingdom in the human race, prayer also is one.

Whether I open my mouth or lift my hand is, before my doing it, strictly within the jurisdiction and power of my personal will; but, however I may decide, my decision, so absolutely free to me, will have been already incorporated by the All-seeing, All-controlling Being as an integral part, however insignificant, of His one all-embracing purpose, leading on to effects and causes beyond itself. Prayer too is only a foreseen action of man which, together with its results, is embraced in the eternal predestination of God. To us this or that blessing may be strictly contingent on our praying for it; but our prayer is nevertheless so far from necessarily introducing change into the purpose of the Unchangeable that it has been all along taken, so to speak, into account by Him. If then, with "the Father of lights" there is in this sense "no variableness, neither shadow of turning," it is not therefore irrational to pray for specific blessings, because God works out His plans not merely in us but by us; and we may dare to say that that which is to us a free self-determination, may be not other than a foreseen element of His work.

¶ Prayer has always to do with the relation between our aims and God's eternal aim, between our will and God's will. Whatever we pray for (and we may pray for even the smallest earthly

things that are really dear to us) must have reference to our highest aim, which is included in God's eternal purpose. Otherwise our prayer is not Christian; we cannot pray with the firm assurance of being heard, we do not have the promise that what we ask will be given us by the Father in heaven.[1]

¶ Nothing can alter God's grace, His will in that sense, His large will and final purpose—our racial blessing, our salvation, our redemption in Jesus Christ. But He is an infinite opportunist. His ways are flexible. His intentions are amenable to us if His will is changeless. The steps of His process are variable according to our freedom and His.[2]

3. For God's will, which we pray may be done, is, after all, no impersonal law. It is the will of a personal Being who in the secret chamber of our soul reasons, expostulates, explains, warns, guides, attracts us to Himself. And this is the thought that may best sustain us to pray and not to faint. If we are created to seek intercourse with God, it is because He so created us, or, in other words, because He first desired intercourse with us, and therefore endowed us with its capacity. It is an attribute of our creation, and therefore a purpose of our Creator. And as Christians we know, what even as men we could not but hope, that the purposes of our creation are purposes of love, and that our every effort to fulfil them will be more than met by Him who first loved us and gave Himself for us, and who has left us the picture of the father who, when his sinful son was a great way off, saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

¶ Above the thought that we are known, with all its awfulness, towers the thought that, despite that knowledge, we are also loved—loved through all the disguises that conceal us from ourselves or others; loved through all our temptations, our sorrows, our sins; loved through all our ineffectual wanderings away from love; loved with a love which, because it is all holy, must at times appear to sinners strangely, imperiously stern; but all the while desires to have fuller fellowship with us in prayer, and to say to us at the last, "Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full".[3]

[1] J. Kaftan, *Die Christliche Lehre vom Gebet*, 14.

[2] P. T. Forsyth, in *The London Quarterly Review*, July 1908, p. 13.

[3] J. R. Illingworth, *University and Cathedral Sermons*, 179.

¶ To our idea of God moral fixity and perfection are needful; but He, "with whom there can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning," is a personal Being who acts by a law of love. He is "the Father of lights" from whom "every good gift and every perfect boon" comes down, and of such an One we are encouraged to "ask in faith, nothing doubting". His predestination is a predestination in love, and, obviously, love offers itself to a free response. Beyond all our finite limitations of time, He has foreseen actions as well as prayers which to us are, at the moment, perfectly spontaneous; they are already included as factors and causes working out that final result which, beyond all dispute is "on a line with the good pleasure of His will".[1]

¶ God's unchangeableness is the very foundation of desire, and hope, and activity, in things religious as in things natural. The uniformity of nature's operations in the one, and the constancy of God's promises in the other, give aim and calculation and certainty to events; God's promises being so many pledges of His procedure, upon the immutability of which the Christian conceives hope and anticipation, and waits for accomplishment. It is His unchangeableness that gives confidence so soon as you know what His purposes are. Of these purposes the Scripture is the record. They are laws like those of the Medes and Persians, which alter not, and their fulfilment may be built on as securely as the rising of the sun, or the revolution of the heavens, or the most stable of nature's courses.[2]

4. But another difficulty here arises. It is obvious that any doctrine of the efficacy of prayer must maintain that God will do for a suppliant something which He will not do for one who does not supplicate. Is not this inconsistent with the unchangeableness, not merely of the Divine predestination, but also of the innermost character, as determined by His essence, of God Himself? Do we not imply that He acts under the influence of emotion? May we not, unconsciously, but none the less really, attribute weakness to Him?

The answer is that, unless there is a deeply rooted disunion between the character of the Creator and the creature, there must be in Him a true emotion; for even in our own personality we are convinced that the constituent elements are not reason and

[1] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 58.

[2] *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, iii. 4.

will only, but also love. It would, indeed, be a moral weakness in a parent always to yield to a child's wayward wish, however injurious to his own purpose of love and to the child's highest interests the wish might be. But it would be the gravest of all moral defects if there were no desire in the parent's heart to grant, if possible, the child's requests, especially when the child reposed in him an absolute trust, expressed by his petition, confident in the conviction that the will of father and child were one.

¶ This doctrine of Providence is by no means free from difficulties; but it avoids the difficulties that beset the doctrine of predestination. God is not moving men like pieces on a chessboard, but is exerting over them, as free, the guidance to which as a good God He is entitled. So long as He treats them as the free and responsible beings that they are, who can object to His ruling their life in the interest of His own gracious and holy purpose? These statements do not remove mystery from Providence; but they justify confidence in such a Providence as the Christian revelation sets forth—a care and direction universal, paternal in spirit, holy in aim, wise in administration, spiritual in quality, educative in purpose, looking ever to the good, and using natural means along with spiritual as agencies helpful to spiritual ends.[1]

¶ The conception of prayer as a means of influencing an unwilling God to do that which He would not otherwise have done rests on a theory of the relation of the Divine will to the human which is equally unsatisfactory to ethics and to religion. The true conception of prayer is that it opens the way for the impartation of the Divine blessings by providing the necessary condition of their bestowal, and this all along the line.[2]

¶ It is irreverent, they say, to express a wish rising out of the narrowness of our intellect and heart, about something which His decree has long ago settled; it is an ill-timed curiosity to say, I wish it might be so and so, when we shall presently learn how He has willed it. Do not be perplexed by such words. Christ did it, therefore we, too, may do it. It is one of the privileges that belong to our position as children of God.[3]

[1] W. N. Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology*, 152.
[2] W. Adams Brown, *Christian Theology in Outline*, 385.
[3] F. E. Schleiermacher, *Sermons*, 41.

XIII.

The Value of Prayer.

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The Value of Prayer.

1. What can prayer do for us? What can it effect? What is its positive value and significance? For there cannot be a doubt that in some way or another prayer is power. The greatest men of history have been men of prayer. The most spiritual men, the prophets and saints and reformers, have been precisely those who were most instant and active in prayer. Our Lord Himself could not dispense with prayer. And all alike, knowing what prayer had actually wrought in their personal experience, bear witness to its wonder-working force for the ennoblement of life. They tell us that prayer is power, that prayer is victory. They tell us that, whatever else we leave undone, we must not leave this undone. They tell us that all is lost unless we pay attention to it. Our whole effectiveness in the last resort depends on our intercourse with God and the unseen world of God in prayer.

¶ I have intimated my fear that it is visionary to expect an unusual success in the human administration of religion unless there are unusual omens: now a most emphatical spirit of prayer would be such an omen; and the individual who should determine to try its last possible efficacy might probably find himself becoming a much more prevailing agent in his little sphere. And if the whole, or the greater number, of the disciples of Christianity were with an earnest and unalterable resolution of each to combine that heaven should not withhold one single influence which the very utmost effort of conspiring and persevering supplication would obtain, it would be a sign that a revolution of the world was at hand.[1]

2. The question formerly so much debated, "Are the effects of prayer merely subjective, or are they objective as well?" has assumed a new form. The truth is that the subjective and the objective cannot be separated, as though the material world were a closed circle, whereas, as all the higher thought of our time assures

[1] John Foster.

us, it is penetrated through and through by spirit; and more especially is this true of the matter which in our physical organism lies closest to human consciousness. Prayer creates the new self, but the new self does not live in a vacuum. It in turn creates the new environment as regards both the physical organism and the world around; and thus it comes about that objective changes take place which would not have taken place but for the intervention of the spiritual state induced by prayer.

¶ Prayer is a reasonable service, in which both heart and mind can participate. It is neither a mere act of obedience, nor a sort of work of supererogation, in which we may or may not participate according to our passing inclination. It is a holy activity of the soul, carrying a double blessing with it—blessed in itself as one of the loftiest functions of the human spirit, and blessed in its consequences, some of them direct and palpable, and some of them reaching far beyond our fondest dreams into the wealth of ultimate benediction.[1]

Let us look at the value of prayer:—

I. For Deliverance.
II. For Character.
III. For Power.

I.

Deliverance.

The life that in prayer habitually lets itself be searched by the Divine gaze cannot continue in conscious, deliberate sin. As some one has said, either the sin will kill the prayer or the prayer the sin. The purifying influence of sincere prayer is undeniable. One cannot court temptation who has earnestly prayed that he be not led into it: he cannot pamper his baser nature if he has prayed for deliverance from evil. In the world into which his prayer introduces him, these desires stand rebuked and abashed; and, when the prayer is over, and he faces the world again, and meets there and in his own heart a thousand unsought solicitations to evil, there will lie upon him the holy obligation to become a co-worker with God in the answering of his own prayer.

[1] Canon Hay Aitken, *The Divine Ordinance of Prayer*, 21.

1. Here then is the unanswerable argument for prayer. It is a cause which operates in the world of facts. It works like other substantial realities of experience. In the ethical region it has power to transform character, making bad persons good and turning the conventionally good into heroes and heroines of the spirit. There is not a mission hall in the slums of any of our great cities which cannot boast of the moral achievements of prayer, some of them dramatic and spectacular enough. Under the influence of mystic contact with the Unseen, sinful habits fall away from men and women, and their lives are lifted to new planes of experience, where even the face of nature seems transfigured as with an ideal glory. Unsuspected spiritual possibilities leap into activity, and the subjects of this wonderful experience speak of themselves henceforth as "new-born". In psychological language, the social relation implied in prayer is realized and a larger and better self than the self hitherto known has become a fact.

¶ Mr. Harold Begbie, in his well-known book, *Twice-born Men*, tells the story of a habitual criminal who passed through such a spiritual crisis. This man began his career of crime by committing a burglary when he was thirteen years of age. Not only was he a criminal, but he rejoiced in his anti-social deeds. Most of his time was spent in prison. During one of these periods of enforced seclusion the thought occurred to him that there was something wrong with his life and that prayer might set it right. For the first time in his life he prayed. It was a very unconventional prayer. He besought Heaven to send him a good woman who would marry him, and give him a chance to live a respectable life. On getting out of prison he continued to pray, until at last the crisis came at a religious meeting, when the desire to steal passed from him never to return. He has shown, by an honoured and useful life since then, that the change was absolute and complete.[1]

¶ In the Old Testament we find prayers for moral strength, and victory over soul-besetments, specimen prayers, doubtless, of a vast number that are unreported. "Clear thou me from hidden faults. Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me" (Ps. xix. 12). "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in

[1] S. McComb, *Prayer: What it Is and What it Does*, 15.

the way everlasting" (cxxxix. 23, 24). "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken me according to thy word" (cxix. 25). "Order my footsteps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (133). "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments" (176). Then, the response to such prayers. "He restoreth my soul: he guideth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Ps. xxiii. 3). "He will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities" (Micah vii. 19). "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name. In the day that I called, thou answeredst me, thou didst encourage me with strength in my soul" (Ps. cxxxviii. 2, 3).[1]

¶ Father, I pray Thee, cleanse me through Thy word. Let it search out and bring to light all that is of self and the flesh in my religion. Let it cut away every root of self-confidence, that the Vine may find me wholly free to receive His life and Spirit. O my Holy Husbandman, I trust Thee to care for the Branch as much as for the Vine. Thou only art my hope.[2]

2. Prayer counteracts earthly-mindedness. So long as we remain subject to our present conditions of education and development by trial, we shall ever be conscious in our spiritual experiences of the downward pull, the gravitating force of earthly influences. How many, alas! succumb altogether to these, and become of the earth earthy! Against this danger the mere habit of prayer, not to speak of the power that comes by prayer, is a great and continuous assistance. How helpful it is, as the season set apart for prayer comes round, to lay aside for a time all the thronging cares and interests of life, save in so far as one remembers them for purposes of intercession or supplication, and to find one's self, for a few moments at least, in a calmer, holier region, dealing with the realities of the inner world, and holding hallowed intercourse with Him whose presence fills it.

Surely the more profoundly we are impressed with the reality of that spiritual environment, the more we "taste the power of the world to come," the less able are earth and the things of earth to hold us down; and while the grosser element in our nature is, one may almost say, for the time being in abeyance, the higher claims its own proper rights, and finds its powers in-

[1] W. A. Cornaby, *Prayer and the Human Problem*, 111.
[2] Andrew Murray, *The Mystery of the True Vine*, 49.

crease by exercise. The first thing that happens to those who wait upon the Lord is that they "renew their strength" and "mount up with wings as eagles". No wonder if, after such higher flights of the soul, we find ourselves possessed of a holy enthusiasm that enables us to run on errands of mercy and not grow weary, and in the practical and sober routine of daily life, "to walk, and not faint".

It may well be questioned whether we should be able to retain our spirituality at all if there were no such thing as prayer. Does it not seem as if without this we should be fairly mastered by our material environment? We remember how the Apostle sums up the case against the enemies of the cross of Christ in the words, "who mind earthly things," and he goes on to affirm that "our citizenship is in the heavens". But unless we claim our privileges as citizens of that higher kingdom and exercise the functions of citizenship, how easily do we fall into the habit which St. Paul so strongly condemns, and set our mind on earthly things!

Prayer, if it be real and spiritual, raises us to our proper plane, and counteracts the earthward tendency against which we have so carefully to guard. The privilege of access to the King of kings is the birthright of all true citizens of the heavenly country: and they who value their birthright will learn to be thankful for the very needs which lead them to seek an audience of Him whom to know with the reverent intimacy of adoring love is, indeed, eternal life.

¶ In prayer, earnest prayer, we exist, for the time, even now, in the things of eternity and of heaven. We form the habit, and practise the habit, of realizing and communicating with a world not seen. We learn to disconnect the two ideas, real and visible. We should not kneel thus, nor thus speak, nor thus confess and praise and pray, if there were not some One out of sight who is all-wise and all-mighty and all-good; if there were not interests more engrossing, and works more important, and pleasures more satisfying, than those of earth and time; if there were not counsels formed, and plans laid, and powers operating, quite apart from and above the relations of human society and the arrangements of confederate kings, nor if we ourselves had no part nor lot in those everlasting realities of which the shadows only and the phantoms are here.[1]

[1] C. J. Vaughan, *Voices of the Prophets*, 230.

¶ "If I try to pray, I must make an effort to realize the presence, the nearness, the accessibleness, of the Most High God. A necessity is laid upon me, and for a little while at least I must deal with spiritual things. If I would pray, I must break some of the fetters that bind me, must dash out of the narrow confines of sense into the world of changeless reality, out of the confused region of seeming into that of being."[1]

II.

Character.

If prayer is what we believe it to be, intercourse with God, it must have a marked effect upon the development of character. It is noteworthy that whilst education alone by no means invariably develops personality, sometimes rather restricting it, cutting off individual expression, and compressing it to a pale copy of conventional ideas, men of prayer, however rugged and uneducated, are always personalities. Surely if prayer is spiritual energy, its vigorous and sustained use must react upon the character of the user. Would not more attention to prayer, not simply as a habit of piety but as a life-force, result in such development of character as would better equip any man for life? If life is given from God, the art of living is living as God meant life to be lived. That can come only from communion with Him and intimacy with His will, such as prayer affords. There has been many a personality which has not fulfilled its promise. One feels bound to ask whether it has fallen short because it has grown out of touch with the life-scheme for which God created it. The prayerful, prayer-directed life can hardly fail to find the straightest path to its goal. Modern religious psychology is rebuking Christianity for not utilizing its natural resources. Neither in the depth nor in the height lies our help. It is nigh unto us, in the heart and the mouth that will pray, and pray with understanding.

1. Prayer is both discipline and education.

(1) *Prayer is discipline.*—We have heard of schools in which the instruction was good, but the discipline bad. It is in that

[1] H. R. Reynolds, *The Philosophy of Prayer*, 14.

sense that the word is now used. What do we mean by good discipline in a school? We mean nothing imaginary, nothing fanciful, nothing (to a practical observer) ambiguous. An experienced visitor feels rather than argues the presence or the absence of this characteristic. There is a readiness, a promptitude, an alacrity of response to the first signal of command or of prohibition; a thoroughness, a completeness, a perfection of obedience; a kind of electric or magical inter-communion between the mind that wills and the minds that obey which at once secures the performance, and yet takes out of it the whole idea of constraint or terror.

We speak of the discipline of life. It is a common figure which describes this world as a vast school, in which men are placed, for the whole of their threescore years and ten or fourscore years, to learn wisdom by experience. The essence of discipline is the schooling of the will; the correction of the natural pride, so that it shall recognize another existence and obey a higher law; the existence and the law of Him in whom all "live and move and have their being". Discipline is the subjugation of the self-will to the will of One higher and greater and more excellent than it. And this subjugation, of which a well-ordered school furnishes an earthly type, is the object—as believing men feel—of all that system and course of the individual life which is as uniform in its principle as it is multifarious in its working.

Now, just what life is, in this respect, as a whole, that the particular ordinance of prayer is as a part: not life only, but prayer, is a discipline. Prayer is a discipline because it shows us what we are: how infirm of purpose, how irresolute in self-control, how impotent even to feel as we would, even to desire that which we know we want.

¶ The inner chamber into which we retire for prayer is a gymnasium for the soul. The apparatus of prayer is designed by God to yield "the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". When we open the windows towards Jerusalem we take deep draughts of the heavenly breezes; this is a valuable form of spiritual culture.

Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air.

To fill the lungs of the soul with spiritual ozone from "the sea of glass mingled with fire" will cleanse from defilement and will revivify neglected tissues. The effort to realize God stretches the sinews of the soul and hardens its muscles.[1]

¶ A course of instruction in the school of spiritual culture is much to be commended to the average Christian. Too many believers belong to the species the Peacock Christian. This species is distinguished by a tail of magnificent proportions. The proud bird is worthy of all admiration so long as it is only required to strut along the ground. But it is ill-supplied with wings for soaring. When a bird is needed to fly to the crest of some high crag, the Peacock must retire and give place to the Eagle. There is a species of Christian to be known as the Eagle Christian. This species has no tail to speak of, but it has wonderful wings. The Peacock Christian is good at strutting; the Eagle Christian is good at soaring. Now, it should be manifest to all that soaring is a more Christian occupation than strutting. Therefore the Eagle Christian is to be preferred to the Peacock Christian. Where can the Eagle Christian be found? In the inner chamber. How can those powerful pinions be developed? By constant prayer. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles." The directions of God's Word are plain. If we would be Eagle Christians, we must "wait upon the Lord": we must enter into our chamber, and shut the door, and pray to the Father which is in secret. Then our wings will grow. It is possible that they may grow at the expense of the tail. Let it go! The exchange is worth making. The world can afford to dispense with some of our fine feathers; it needs sadly more soaring spirits.[2]

(2) *Prayer is education.*—Education is not instruction. The best instructed man in the world might be the worst educated. Education is the bringing up. Education is the training for life. Education is the calling out of powers, the strengthening of faculties, the counteraction of faults, the controlling and coercing of vices, the preparation of the whole man for the whole of being, the presentation of body, soul, and spirit, equipped for the work of time and for the enjoyment of eternity.

All God's dealings with us are of the nature of an education. God educated the world by a succession of Divine revelations, training it gradually, by elements and rudiments, by types and

[1] J. E. Roberts, *Private Prayers and Devotions*, 173. [2] *Ibid.*, 175.

symbols, by precepts and prophecies for the full illumination of the gospel and of the Spirit. He formed habits in man of thought and judgment, of principle and action, that He might bring him out at last, in the fulness of grace and knowledge, to be His representative and His witness on an earth too long debased by his fall and defiled by his sin. And God educates each man by a system of personal dealing, of which the characteristic is the same; it is an education; it is a formation of habits, whether of thought or of action, under the direction of His Providence, His Word, His Church, His Spirit. And prayer is one chief part of this education.

¶ A perfect Christian character is a very beautiful product. It includes a bunch of Christian graces, each of them exquisitely lovely, and each of them delicately harmonized with all the others. Such a character cannot be developed easily. "Come and learn of me," said the great Teacher. No sooner do we come than we discover how much we have to learn. He is so fair that it will take us a long time to become like Him. We have to cultivate many graces; faith, hope, love, humility, reverence, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering, unselfishness, spirituality—these are some of the flowers that bloom in the garden of the Lord, and that must flourish in our soul if it is to become as a watered garden wherein the Beloved of our souls delights to walk. There is no universal recipe for cultivating all the graces. But it is certain that prayer provides a marvellously congenial soil for their healthy growth.[1]

2. Prayer, earnest and continued, has its influence on our faculties.

(1) *It strengthens the mind.*—It has been observed that persons without natural ability have, through the earnestness of their devotional habits, acquired in time powers of sustained thought, and an accuracy and delicacy of intellectual touch, which would not else have belonged to them. The intellect being the instrument by which the soul handles religious truth, a real interest in religious truth will of itself often furnish an educational discipline; it alone educates an intellect which would otherwise be uneducated.

¶ One day, a student, interviewing him privately, was propounding to him some theological enigmas, perhaps a little self-

[1] J. E. Roberts, *Private Prayers and Devotions*, 177.

consciously and perhaps half hoping to entangle the Professor in speculative toils. After listening to him for a while, Dr. Rainy suddenly said, "Did you ever take this difficulty to God in prayer, Mr. ——?" Then he went on to discuss it, not with mere dialectic, but out of his own religious experience, and, after some talk, knelt down and gave utterance to the simplest and devoutest prayer.[1]

(2) *Prayer invigorates the will.*—Habitual prayer constantly confers decision on the wavering, and energy on the listless, and calmness on the excitable, and disinterestedness on the selfish. It braces the moral nature by transporting it into a clear, invigorating, unearthly atmosphere; it builds up the moral life, insensibly but surely, remedying its deficiencies, and strengthening its weak points, till there emerges a comparatively symmetrical and consistent whole, the excellence of which all must admit, though its secret is known only to those who know it by experience.

¶ Prayer, in so far as it implies that the mind has been uplifted towards an ideal of all goodness, a going out into the infinite, is invaluable to man, and marks the great distinction between him and the lower animals. It is answered so far as it is high and holy inspiration, being an exercise of mind which thereby creates the condition it prays for. After all, we do not know that mind power has not a material existence somewhere, just as much as electricity has. If will-power could be brought together as a concentrated force, it might have very astonishing results. At present it is too broken up.[2]

3. What are the virtues which prayer produces? Let us look at some of them separately.

(1) It produces *a sense of sinfulness.*—When prayer once brings man into the felt presence of his God and reveals to him something of God's own infinite holiness, His awe-inspiring purity and His perfect hatred of sin, there, if anywhere, will he who prays learn to abhor himself, to loathe his own deep sinfulness, to repent, to cleanse his hands and purify his heart, "perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord".

(2) It produces *humility of mind*—so ornamental to Christian character. Paul was like the rest of us in one respect—in danger

[1] P. C. Simpson, *The Life of Principal Rainy*, i. 211.
[2] *George Frederick Watts*, ii. 223.

of being "exalted above due measure". Job had a good deal to say about himself. It was all *Job*, what *Job* was and what *Job* had done, until God took him to task, told him to gird up his loins and answer a few questions, when Job learned his lesson—that he was but a worm as compared with God, and he went down in the dust and said, "I abhor myself". When we see God's greatness we recognize our own littleness.

Humility is not the contempt of self for self's sake, it is the forgetfulness of self for love's sake. And it evidences itself first in that largeness of soul which gives us leisure and liberty to honour all men, to contemplate their excellences, to consider their virtues, to acquaint ourselves with their worthiness, until we learn to esteem them more highly than we esteem ourselves, until we joyfully give God thanks for the grace which He has bestowed upon them.

¶ The motto of the Gottesfreunde was, "Love to be unknown, and desire to be little esteemed". A like temper is encouraged in the Church of the Unitas Fratrum, which used to put this prayer into the lips of its members: "From the unhappy desire of becoming great, preserve and keep us, gracious Lord and God".[1]

(3) It produces that *submission of will* which is one of the chief conditions of acceptable approach unto God. More elements than one enter into true religion. To be truly religious is to do the will of God. But Liddon has shown us how prayer is also religion in action. To pray is to put not only the affections in motion, the will in motion, but the understanding in motion as well. Thus in prayer a man comes to see that other interests than his own are in the hands of God, that what he asks might not in the end be best, and that in view of God's infinite wisdom He must know what is best, in view of His infinite justice He must do what is best, and in view of His perfect love He must desire what is best; and so believing with all his heart that even as God hath said, "All things work together for good to them that love God," he can say with becoming grace, "Thy will, O God, and not mine, be done". God is always on our side; it is necessary sometimes to pray ourselves over to His side.

Prayer is essentially submission. To pray is to submit, and to submit is to pray. Nothing could well be more wide of the

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *Waymarks in the Pursuit of God*, 122.

heavenly mark than the vulgar and commonplace conception of prayer—the conception which supposes prayer to be a kind of spiritual and resistless agency for inducing God to do what we wish; to avert our calamities and fulfil our desires. Nothing could be more remote from the truth than this selfish notion of the character of prayer. True prayer is not selfishness but submission. Selfishness is destructive of prayer; prayer is victorious over selfishness. They never truly pray who pray that their own will may be done, and that they themselves may have their way. In the truest prayer there is no will except the will of God, no way except the way of Heaven. To submit to the way of Heaven, to surrender to the will of God, this, and this only, is truly to pray; to pray in the name, and after the manner, of Christ.

¶ The pull of our prayer may not move the everlasting throne, but, like the pull on a line from the bow of a boat, it may draw us into closer fellowship with God and fuller harmony with His wise and holy will.[1]

(4) One of the chief fruits of prayer in the daily life is *peace*. "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." A life of prayer is a life of peace. There may be plenty of outward trials and troubles in such a life, but there will be inward peace—peace of heart and mind. Not alike perhaps and equally in all, for calmer natures realize peace more easily than others, and at times even natural quietude of disposition may be mistaken for true peace. But in all who truly pray, some degree of peace will be found. Even restless, eager, unquiet, passion-tossed souls are not without their visions of peace, if they truly pray. Their natural restlessness may mar and interrupt it continually; yet at the bottom of their hearts there will be a blessed sense of peacefulness which they can realize in their calmer moments, and especially in the hour of prayer.

¶ In the most emphatic exhortations to be found in Scripture for having recourse to this solace, the relief promised has respect

rather to the *peace* which follows on the putting up of our prayers than to any promise that, in our time and way at least, the prayer itself should be granted. "In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Here everything, you see, turns upon the resulting *peace*. It is as if the apostle had said, to anxious parents, for instance: "I do not promise that, in answer to your prayers, your child shall be raised up from a bed of sickness: only that while it lies there you shall have *peace*". Or as if to a family in great trouble, he had said: "I do not promise that that black cloud which is now gathering over you and around you, with such thick and disastrous gloom, shall dissipate; but that in the cloud, and through the cloud, and even while there seems no way out of the cloud, you shall have *peace*". You have made your requests known unto God. They may be wise, or they may be unwise. The time may be too soon for granting them, or too late. Whether of the twain you know not, and must not be careful to know. The matter is before the throne. Grief, trouble, disappointment, a bright result or a sad, —they are all in the ordering of Him who upholds the world. Enough that you say with David, "Lord, I make my prayer unto thee in an acceptable time". If it be granted, I bless. If it be postponed, I wait. If it be denied, I bow.[1]

4. Let us illustrate the effect of prayer on the soul by borrowing the words of two modern writers of fiction, the one American, the other English. For the facts of the spiritual life have, for better or worse, come into the common speech of men. The old primness is gone, and a novelist no longer hesitates to preach, or to handle the things of religion.

(1) James Lane Allen, in *The Choir Invisible*, speaking of an old face which retains the freshness of Easter lilies, says: "For prayer will in time make the human countenance its own divinest altar; years upon years of fine thoughts, like music shut up within, will vibrate along the nerves of expression until the lines of the living instrument are drawn into correspondence and the harmony of visible form matches the unheard harmony of the mind". This exquisite carving of the face of one who is habitually in prayer cannot be mistaken; it is a sacrament, "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace". The

[1] Daniel Moore, *Aids to Prayer*, 36.

beauty gained in this way survives the flight of youth, and is clearest in old age; nay, after death, the face of a praying soul in the stillness and the expectation shines with a light which seems at once to beam out of it and to fall upon it.

¶ Jesus in the act of prayer was transfigured; He became radiant and even His garment glistened. In their degree, all praying souls are so transfigured. The tranquil joy, assured against storm and sorrow; the suggestion of that peace which the world neither gives nor takes away; the rest of the soul in the bosom of God; the sense of the legions of invisible angels at hand; the circumambient atmosphere of another world; these are the marks of those who are exercised in prayer. So Percival saw in the eyes of the holy maid praying for the Holy Grail,

> Beyond my knowing of them, beautiful,
> Beyond all knowing of them, wonderful,
> Beautiful in the light of holiness.[1]

(2) But even when this outward effect is not yet produced, the inward reality may be already there. And this the English novelist, Mr. A. C. Benson, refers to in *Beside Still Waters*. The speaker has discovered the effectiveness of a certain kind of prayer: "This was not a mechanical repetition of verbal forms, but a strong and secret uplifting of the heart to the Father of all. There were moments when one seemed baffled and powerless, when one's own strength seemed utterly unequal to the burden; prayer on such occasions did not necessarily bring a perfect serenity and joy, though there were times when it brought even that; but it brought sufficient strength; it made the difficult, the dreaded thing possible. . . . It seemed to reveal a dim form moving behind the veil of things, which in the moment of entreaty seemed to suspend its progress, to stop, and draw near, to smile."

Whoever has made it a practice to spend certain hours or half-hours in the day alone with God knows the extraordinary effect produced by the gradual accumulation of experiences, and the settled habit of the soul. Many of those hours seem dry and listless; there is no sign or sound; many of them are burdened and sad with the sense of sin and the weight of sorrow. Only now and then does prayer become so limpid and spontaneous and

[1] R. F. Horton, *My Belief*, 183.

vocal that one is constrained to write down the words of the illuminated moments. And yet the habit in long years secures a remarkable result. The assured presence of God; the fact of redemption in the cross; the knowledge of a life hidden with Christ in God; the ready recourse to God in a moment of surprise or danger; the conscious connexion between the soul, as a small fact in time and space, and the infinite and eternal God; these become the very atmosphere and meat and drink of the inward life.[1]

¶ "I have known men," says Goodwin—it must have been himself—"who came to God for nothing else but just to come to Him, they so loved Him. They scorned to soil Him and themselves with any other errand than just purely to be alone with Him in His presence. Friendship is best kept up, even among men, by frequent visits; and the more free and defecate those frequent visits are, and the less occasioned by business, or necessity, or custom they are, the more friendly and welcome they are."[2]

In the quietness of life,
When the flowers have shut their eye,
And a stainless breadth of sky
Bends above the hill of strife,
Then, my God, my chiefest Good,
Breathe upon my lonelihood:
Let the shining silence be
Filled with Thee, my God, with Thee.[3]

III.

Power.

1. Each faculty, or endowment, or form of activity that belongs to man has, over and above a number of more indirect effects, its appropriate and characteristic action, in which its whole strength is embarked, and in which it finds its full play and impetus. To this law religion is no exception. While its influence upon human life is strong and various in proportion to its high aim and object; while it is felt, when it wields real empire, in every department of human activity and interest, as an invigorating, purifying, chastening, restraining, guiding influence, it too has a work

[1] R. F. Horton. [2] A. Whyte, *Santa Teresa*, 21.
[3] P. C. Ainsworth, *The Threshold Grace*, 85.

peculiarly its own. In this work it is wont to embark its collective forces, and to become peculiarly conscious of its direction and intensity. This work is prayer. Prayer is emphatically religion in action. It is the soul of man engaging in that particular form of activity which pre-supposes the existence of a great bond between itself and God. Prayer is, therefore, nothing more or less than the noblest kind of human exertion. It is the one department of action in which man realizes the highest privilege and capacity of his being. And, in doing this, he is himself enriched and ennobled almost indefinitely: now, as of old, when he comes down from the mountain, his face bears tokens of an irradiation which is not of this world.

So, I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake;
Over-head, did my thunder combine
With my underground mine:
Till I looked from my labour content
To enjoy the event.

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
Did I say "without friend"?
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun's self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest!
Do you see? just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
——So, *I* was afraid![1]

2. The tonic, invigorating, and enlightening influence of prayer in the life of every one who knows how to pray is one of the most unquestionable facts of empirical psychology. One may, if one likes, assert dogmatically the impossibility of any "answer" to petitional prayer, one may explain "communion" as auto-suggestion, one may deny the existence of any God and

[1] Browning, *Instans Tyrannus.*

insist that this is a purely material universe, and still be forced to admit the almost unique value of prayer as a source of strength and guidance in the lives of an exceedingly large proportion of the community.

Prayer is either practical, capable of doing things, or it is absurd and even ridiculous. Either it means unspeakable blessedness, enlargement of life, release of psychic energies hitherto bound fast, a real increase in spiritual power, or it is vanity and emptiness. Prayer is thus seen, as a matter of cold scientific fact, to have an important bearing upon character. Like morality or art, it is a factor in the formation of human personality. Other things being equal, the praying man has a unity of life and a corresponding forcefulness of character to which the non-praying man can lay no claim. As William James remarks: "In few of us are functions not tied up by the exercise of other functions. Relatively few medical and scientific men can pray. Few can carry on any living commerce with 'God'. Now many of us are well aware of how much freer and abler our lives would be were such important forms of energizing not sealed up by the critical atmosphere in which we have been reared. There are in every one potential forms of activity that actually are shunted out from use. Part of the imperfect vitality under which we labour can thus be easily explained." It is a matter of history that men who have really prayed have also been men of unusual force of character. We cannot conceive that Martin Luther or General Gordon or Mr. Gladstone would have been the men they were, or would have left the mark they did, had they not been men of prayer. The Master of prayer seems to have been most impressed by its quality as an energizing principle in human nature. There has come down to us a great mystical saying of His which bears every mark of authenticity: "This kind goeth not out save by prayer". In other words, something happens which would not happen without prayer.

¶ On ourselves who thus believe in the efficacy of prayer, and, therefore, its transforming influence, an obligation, never more serious than in the present day, is laid, to take care that we give as little occasion as by Divine grace is possible to the severe reproach that there is a wide difference between devotion and goodness. To allow prayer to react on all sides of our own

moral and spiritual character and life, with all its penetrating and comprehensive power, is the only real way in which we can take our stand in the long line of witnesses, by whom belief in its reality and efficacy has been handed on from generation to generation. "He," Dr. Vaughan once said from the University pulpit at Cambridge, "who goes forth from this exercise into the world of business, into the world of society, into the world of literary, scientific, political, ecclesiastical activity, goes forth to remember God—goes forth (it is the other half of duty) to remind of God." But such a result can be achieved only by conscientious observance, however brief for some the observance may necessarily be, of stated seasons, and times, and modes of prayer. It is through such regularity, such obedience to rule, that in prayer, as indeed in all departments of life, habits are gained, and we become truly free, although at the cost of strict discipline at first, to call this great power into such activity that it becomes the means of sustaining the supernatural life, while it is constantly reforming and transforming our natural faculties. As a beautiful flower becomes what it is by living in the sunlight, so the soul fulfils the design of its creation and re-creation by turning to God, revealed in the Person of the Incarnate Son. The reason why nothing can be a substitute for prayer is that, through its practice, this contact is maintained. When that contact becomes habitual, our spiritual nature puts forth its influence over all that is material, the body through which it finds expression, and the world which is given us to claim for God. Without that continuous contact, the spiritual nature becomes itself materialized, the bond-servant, at last, of the flesh and of the world.[1]

3. The power of prayer does not belong to the same order of energy as the forces of nature—gravitation, electricity, magnetism and the like; and there is no force resident in the universe but upon that particular force prayer can lay its hand and call its might into service. This becomes possible because, in distinction from natural forces, prayer is a personal power. It has personal intelligence to guide it, personal will to apply it, personal life to give it character and energy, and tenderness and love, and, finally, personal control on the higher side to prevent it from working awry from the purpose of God. Prayers in line with God's will move in the realm of moral certainty, because they are moral; in the realm of natural certainty, because they obey law; and in the realm of Divine certainty, because backed by

[1] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 337.

the promises of God. And these three are stages in one certainty. The energies of the universe are arranged in hierarchical order, God Himself being supreme—material forces, vital forces, mental forces, spiritual forces—the lower subject to the higher, and all controlled by a Person for the benefit of persons. For He who ruleth all things after the counsel of His own will maketh all things work together for good to them that love God. And more, the Creator of all things has delegated man with power akin to His own, and Divinely charged him to "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over all the earth".

Along with the crude and mechanical conceptions which have so often dominated in theology and religion, we have popular conceptions of prayer which do not seem to grasp its ethical significance and spiritual value. Much of the language concerning prayer as a "power" seems to rest upon the idea that its operation is something like that of a physical force. In nature physical forces produce certain definite and invariable results. Similar uniformity of sequences has sometimes been claimed for prayer; and some have been willing to lower the whole subject to the physical sphere, and put the efficacy of prayer to the test of experiment by means of a "prayer-gauge". Such an idea derives all its force from prevalent misconceptions concerning the power of prayer. Our idea of prayer should be elevated above the physical sphere, and ennobled by our associating with it the thought of the moral and spiritual relations with which prayer is primarily concerned. The true power of our prayers with God lies in the faith which they utter. It was just in this connexion of ideas that Jesus employed His strongest words concerning the power of prayer, throwing His thought into a parabolic form: "If ye have faith, and doubt not . . . if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (Matt. xxi. 21). Or, if Luke has preserved the more exact setting of this saying (Luke xvii. 6), it was in response to the prayer of the Apostles, "Increase our faith," that Jesus gave them this assurance of how great things are possible to faith.

¶ This is the meaning of prayer. This is the one secret of power. We simply become that through which He manifests

Himself. And this is the whole meaning of that much-talked-about, little-understood thing called "power". Our Lord Jesus thorn-torn, nail-pierced, now glory-crowned, *manifesting Himself* —this is power, and only this. All power has been given unto Him. All power is in Him. All power comes out from Him as He is allowed free play in our lives; from Him, through us, out to His world.[1]

¶ To talk to nominal believers on the subject of prayer is generally to find that they have little confidence in prayer *as a power*. Do they believe that prayer effects, *alters* anything? No, for nominal Christianity is but a refined naturalism; it wears the cross, seeing that it cannot be got out of either the Bible or the Church, as an ornament, but it never presses it to its heart, it never roots its life beneath its shadow; it is to it a thing extrinsic, adventitious, out of harmony with all that it *really* believes and grows to. Nominalism contains within it no deep-seated sense of sin, of need, or of dependence; how then can it lay its grasp upon the great co-related truths of sacrifice, expiation, mediation? But far otherwise is it with him who has learnt to look upon himself *as a mortal and corruptible being with immortal and perfect ends;* far otherwise with him who feels himself urged towards communion with the Divine through the instinct and necessity of the renewed nature, yet unable *from a felt deficiency in that nature* to attain to such a communion without help from the Divine itself! Such a spirit is prepared to look beyond itself for deliverance and for aid! "How," asks Chateaubriand, "is man in his state of actual imperfection to attain to that ideal to which he continually tends? Some will say, through the exertion of his own energy. *But there is a manifest disproportion between the given amount of force and the weight it has to remove.*" Hence the demand for auxiliary aids to human weakness; hence the need of Christ, of faith, of *prayer*, "the dynamic agency of heaven".[2]

My hands were full of many things,
Which I did precious hold
As any treasure of the kings,
Silver or gems or gold.
The Master came and touched my hands,
The scars were in His own;
"I must have empty hands," said He,
"Wherewith to work My works through thee."

[1] S. D. Gordon *The Quiet Time*, 28. [2] Dora Greenwell, *Essays*, 125.

My hands were stained with marks of toil,
Defiled with dust of earth,
And I my work did ofttimes soil,
And render little worth.
The Master came and touched my hands,
And crimson were His own;
And when amazed on mine I gazed,
Lo! every stain was gone!
"I must have cleansèd hands," said He,
"Wherewith to work My works through thee."

My hands were growing feverish,
And cumbered with much care;
Trembling with haste and eagerness,
Nor folded oft in prayer.
The Master came and touched my hands,
With healing in His own:
And calm and still to do His will
They grew, the fever gone.
"I must have quiet hands," said He,
"Wherewith to work My works through thee."

My hands were strong in fancied strength,
But not in power Divine,
And bold to take up tasks at length—
They were not His, but mine.
The Master came and touched my hands,
And mighty were His own;
But mine since then have powerless been,
Save His were laid thereon.
"And it is only thus," said He,
"That I can work My works through thee."

XIV.

Hindrances to Prayer.

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HINDRANCES TO PRAYER.

1. THERE are many who have experienced at times an intense dissatisfaction with their prayers. They seem so lame, so cold, so profitless that they are inclined to exclaim, "What a weariness, what a mockery it is!" They are constantly disappointed with themselves. The heart that seemed so full has run empty ere they reached their knees. They have nothing to say; all their thoughts have fled from them; and the intense longing comes across their heart that some one would teach them how to pray.

¶ I think it was some sense of dissatisfaction with their prayers which stole into the hearts of the disciples, and prompted the petition—"Lord, teach us to pray". The sight of their praying Master doubtless aroused the feeling. As they saw His earnestness, His faith, and how many things He had to lay before His Father, they craved to know the secret of that spirit of prayer. They contrasted it, in their own minds, with their own faint, dead, spiritless, and meagre petitions; and realized, with a vividness they never felt before, how grievously defective in all the features of true prayer were their own lifeless supplications.[1]

2. Can we discern any of the causes of this barrenness in prayer? We may find some help if we consider the following:—

(i) Inattentiveness.
(ii) Preoccupation.
(iii) Doubt.
(iv) Pride.
(v) Selfishness.

I.

INATTENTIVENESS.

Take, first, wandering thoughts. Very likely our thoughts wander at other times besides during our prayers. Very likely

[1] W. Boyd Carpenter.

we find it difficult to fix them steadily upon anything we want to study or think about attentively. We have suffered ourselves to fall into a bad intellectual habit of inattention, and so have lost in a great measure the power of fixing the mind upon any subject. We are not likely to be able to fix the mind upon our prayers, if our ordinary habit of mind is thoughtless, vague, indolent, indifferent. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" is a rule which may be applied with equal force to the mind and to that which it "findeth to do". Those who can at all times fix the mind upon that which they are doing have a great advantage in their prayers.

1. The very act of controlling the thoughts, of composing and concentrating the mind, implies often a strenuous effort of the will. It is one of the illusions with which it is common for men to flatter themselves that they are masters and rulers of their own minds. They fancy they can think about what they please, and when they please, not considering the curious independence and waywardness of that strange faculty of thought which belongs to them, and which seems to be an essential part of their moral being, but which may yet be said to have a life and, if one may go so far, even a will of its own. For the truth is that the mind works on of itself without asking leave of us, without our help and, what is more remarkable still, without our knowledge. That this is so in our dreams is apparent to everybody. Is it not a thing that is always surprising us afresh, that while we have been asleep our minds have been as busy as ever, working with amazing rapidity, and with a vigour and ingenuity that betrayed no symptom of weariness? Almost in a moment that fantastic story-teller has woven a romance out of the slenderest materials, a mere hint from a physical sensation, or a fancy that we left it to deal with as it chose, when we sank into unconsciousness, or a sound which never disturbed our slumber, but of which it failed not to take note, and which summoned, like a fairy horn, all the strange creatures that were to play their part on the mystic stage. We, as it seemed, had nothing to do with it all. We lay there impassive, at rest. It was not we who thought out those astonishing stories, who put this and that together in the laborious and deliberate fashion which is common

to us in our waking hours, when we try to please a child by telling him a tale. It was the mind that built up that visionary fabric, not we ourselves.

And what happens when we are asleep happens also, in a measure, when we are awake. Is it we who control our thoughts all the day long? Is it not rather our thoughts that control us? The mind pursues its own course. It responds, not waiting for permission but through the operation of its own laws, to the stimulus which it is constantly receiving through the senses. It is drawn this way by some chance suggestion from without, or driven that way by some impulse from within. And the consequence is that often we have no idea what it is that we are thinking of until, suddenly, we become aware of the regions into which we are being carried, and are filled with shame that we should permit the mind to be occupying itself, as we express it, with such matters. So independent is the mind of man. And how stubborn it is, how rebellious. Let any one try to "fix his mind" on any subject he may select; what hard work it is unless long practice has made it easy. The mind refuses to be fixed. It will not come when it is called, or if it comes it will not stay. It is busy painting pictures and does not like being disturbed. It has run far on into the future, and has no inclination to return, at its owner's call, to the prosaic present. Or it has escaped again into some happy past, or it is indolent and languid, and does not wish to be roused. This is a familiar trouble, and it is easy to see how it makes it often very difficult for us to pray. We try to collect our thoughts, but they are scattered again as soon as they are collected. It is as though we were rolling a huge stone up a steep ascent. We can make it move a little by dint of great exertion, but it slips back the moment our efforts are relaxed. We try to follow the prayers in church. We try honestly, and we succeed—for how long? Alas! before ever we are aware, this restless mind has flitted away, and travelled far to some world with which we had no present concern, but in which it has promptly made itself at home. It is in the counting house; it is in the cricket field; it is anywhere but in the church. We try to pray in private. We begin with what may seem to be genuine prayer, that is, we begin by saying what we feel, or what we are really thinking. But how often the humiliating discovery

is made that in some unguarded moment the mind has stolen off on some business of its own, and left us there on our knees repeating phrases that mean nothing, offering formal petitions that run glibly off the tongue from the force of habit, but have in them no life, no soul, no value, no significance whatever. As Faber sings:—

> The world that looks so dull all day
> Glows bright on me at prayer,
> And plans that ask no thought but then
> Wake up and meet me there.

¶ Attention is an effect, and you cannot have an effect without its cause. Is it not sacrifice, then, that is to say, is it not love, that lies at the root of attention? Consider your own case: did you ever experience any difficulty in attending to what you loved? Is it not significant, for instance, that a person who loves another is said to pay attention? Think, too, of little children, how careless and inattentive they will sometimes be at their work one moment, and how devoted they will be to their play the next.[1]

¶ Truly then we pray well when we think of no other thing, but all our mind is dressed to heaven and our soul is enflamed with the fire of the Holy Ghost. Thus truly a marvellous plenteousness of God's goodness is found in us; for from the innermost marrow of our hearts shall the love of God rise, and all our prayer shall be with desire and effect; so that we over-run not the words, but nearly every syllable with a great cry and desire we shall offer to our Lord. Our heart being kindled with hot fire our prayer is also kindled, and in the savour of sweetness is offered by our mouth in the sight of God, so that it is great joy to pray. For whiles in prayer a marvellous sweetness is given to the one praying, the prayer is changed to song.[2]

2. But thought can be controlled by will. If it were not so, St. Paul would never have written, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things". Concentration of thought on prayer is hindered not only by careless thinking of God and eternal realities, but by inattentive habits in regard to

[1] Spencer Jones, *Now and Then*, 121.
[2] Richard Rolle, *The Mending of Life* (ed. Comper), 220.

any subject. Life is a whole, and the ordinary frame of the daily life will be, practically, the mood of the hour of prayer. "Learn to give your whole mind," it has been truly said, "to whatever you are doing, to the book you are reading, the letter you are writing, nay, even to the sweeping of a room, or the making of a garment."

¶ When thou shalt have entered the church for prayer or praise, leave outside the tumult of wavering thoughts, and be inwardly forgetful of all care as to outer matters, so that thou mayest be free to devote thyself to God alone. For it is not possible that there should at any time talk with God one who at the same time is also silently chatting with the whole world. Give attention, therefore, to Him who giveth attention to thee. Listen to Him as He speaketh to thee, that He Himself may hear thee when thou speakest to Him. It will thus happen that if thou assistest at the utterance of Divine praises with due reverence and thoughtfulness, if thou hearkenest intently and diligently to every word of Holy Scripture, thou wilt hear God speak to thee. Not that I say that I do these things; but I wish to do them; I grieve at not having done them; I am vexed when I do them not. But do thou to whom greater grace is granted, with vows and devout prayer turn towards thyself the merciful ears of the Lord; with tears and sighs beseech Him to look with clemency on thy wanderings from faithfulness, and with spiritual beings praise and glorify Him in all His works. For nothing more pleaseth the citizens on high, nothing giveth more joy to the Heavenly King.[1]

3. There are, no doubt, some people with whom the difficulty of any sustained effort in prayer rises from a natural and constitutional incapacity for any prolonged concentration of thought. Such need to be reminded that God "knoweth whereof we are made," and that, as He does not ignore our natural temperament, so we do well in fully recognizing it. Where this is a trouble to us, it is well to shorten the actual time spent on any single occasion in devotional exercises, and, if possible, to multiply the occasions, and all the more frequently pour out our souls before God. Only a few minutes, or even moments, of really earnest and purposeful prayer are certainly of more spiritual value than a comparatively lengthy period consumed in listlessness. It is only

[1] St. Bernard.

self-deception when we quiet our conscience by trying to persuade ourselves that we have been praying, when really we have only been kneeling. Better far to recognize and admit our constitutional infirmity, and, without yielding to it, none the less take special measures to discount its adverse influence, rather than court discouragement by persistently attempting to accomplish what our natural disposition renders almost an impossibility.

¶ If "the archers" disturb us as soon as we approach the well, so that we seem unable to slake our thirst, we may do well to think upon those words of St. Paul's which embody something more valuable than a fanciful Hebrew tradition, "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ". That the Rock followed the Hebrews on their wilderness journey is a poetical fiction, but that the spiritual Rock does follow us in our lifelong journey, ever there within our reach, is a supremely blessed fact; and where He is, even "in the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert".[1]

II.

Preoccupation.

1. This is often found a very serious hindrance to prayer. Take such a case as a young mother with her little child. Her intense absorbing love for it fills her soul. She kneels down to pray. She can pray for her little one. She can thank God for it. But when she tries to pray for other things, straightway her thoughts fly back to it. She cannot banish the remembrance of it even for a few minutes. She is frightened at the discovery. "Is not this idolatry?" she asks in terror. Surely she loves her child far better than she loves God. Yes; in one way. She does love her child with the wonderful power and intensity of a mother's love. She would die for it. But she cannot love God with that wonderful mother's love. God gave it her not for Himself but for her child. So let her not be frightened at it. But let her none the less pray that she may not make her child her God. Let her seek very earnestly from God the power to turn her soul from her child to Him in simple, lowly devotion, or there may be peril in her beautiful mother love. Look again at one who has some scheme which fills his thoughts and interests.

[1] Canon Hay Aitken, *The Divine Ordinance of Prayer*, 299.

A man is building a new house, and planning his garden. He can think of little else. It is natural enough he should be greatly interested in his plans. But then they *will* come into his mind when he is at his prayers. This is a great snare, and needs much resolution and many struggles. It matters not what the care or the interest is, it must not be allowed to get between the soul and God. It must be made a subject of special prayer that it may not do so.

¶ And my life is filled with such things, and my sole hope is in Thy great mercy. For if our heart becomes occupied with things of this kind, by a whole host of vanities, then our prayers are often interrupted and disturbed by such thoughts, and when we are in Thy presence, when we are directing the voice of the heart to Thine ear, that great business is suddenly broken in upon by an inrush of trifling imaginations.[1]

¶ If you would guard against wandering in prayer, you must practise yourself in keeping a check upon your thoughts at other times. If, as Scripture saith of the fool, our "eyes are in the ends of the earth," if we let our senses wander after everything which presents itself to them, we are forming in ourselves a habit of distraction, which will oppress us in our prayers too. It is not a light matter that we be gazing on everything which we can see, that we listen to all we may hear, that we keep all the avenues of our senses open, and let what will enter in. Rather Holy Scripture so often says, "They lift up their eyes," as if we should not for ever be gazing around us, but keep them rather staid, until we need them. The compass of our mind is narrow at best, and cannot hold many things; one thing thrusts out another; and if we admit these manifold things into our mind, we shall have small room for its true and rightful Owner and Inmate, God. If we let thoughts chase each other through our minds at will, they will find their accustomed entrance there in our prayers too; if we close not the doors of our minds against them at other times, they will stand wide open then.[2]

2. Yet prayer offered to God is wholly without meaning unless distractions are kept from the mind. Our experience testifies to this. Nothing is so difficult as to secure the mind from distracting thoughts during prayer, but no one tries to pray without trying to do this difficult and discouraging thing all the

[1] St. Augustine. [2] E. B. Pusey, *Occasional Sermons*, 127.

time, evidently under the conviction that thoughts which interrupt communion with God utterly destroy prayer; and if men fail in keeping free from distractions, sooner or later they cease to try to pray.

¶ And let him never give over because of evil thoughts, even if they are sprung upon him in the middle of his prayer, for the devil so vexed the holy Jerome even in the wilderness. But all these toils of soul have their sure reward, and their just recompense set out for them. And I can assure you, as one who knows what she is saying, that one single drop of water out of God's living well will both sustain you and reward you for another day and another night of your life of life-long prayer.[1]

III.

Doubt.

1. Doubt of Divine love is a still more serious hindrance. It may be doubt, not of God's love generally, but of that love as directed to ourselves personally. Hiding of the Father's face is bitterness to the soul; and when doubts come in upon the soul which hide out the sense of God's love, the overwhelming waters may be said to have begun to break over our heads. Such doubts have come terribly upon many who are plainly people of God; they have rolled in one after another upon the heart, until at length they have brought with them actual despair; and all that the poor tempest-tossed believer could do, was just to utter such words as those of the Psalmist, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I".

¶ A Christian man who had served God for a lifetime was seized with consumption. The repeated visits of the attending minister seemed to afford no consolation, and, in truth, all the ordinary means of comforting were tried in vain. Thus matters went on for a long time, and at length the invalid went abroad for the winter. At the end of the winter he returned, and the minister having heard that he continued in the same state of mind as before, held back from visiting him. The invalid, however, desired to partake of the Holy Communion, and so his pastor went to him. It was a very painful scene; the agitation of this poor afflicted Christian was such that all present were greatly distressed. For many weeks did he linger, the minister

[1] Santa Teresa.

now visiting him regularly as before, but the same distressing doubts continued; and to all human appearance, they were likely to shroud him, even in his departure. The mercy of God, however, at length dispelled the gloom. One night the sick man asked for his dressing things, and washed and shaved himself; then he asked for a clean shirt, and when he put it on, and was set up in the bed, he said, "Now I am dressed for my last journey"; thus he remained for a couple of hours, when lo! all clouds and mists rolled from before his eyes, the light of heaven shone in upon him, a ray of brightness streamed through the golden gates upon his soul, and he departed full of joy.[1]

2. The will has a large part to play in meeting this trial. It must control imagination by enlisting it on the side of God, "as the ally and enlightener and support of faith"; it must forbid the thought that, because we do not feel that God is with us, He who said, "I the Lord change not," has withdrawn from us; it must lead mind and heart to centre themselves not on self but on God. When, at Horeb, the "still small voice" roused Elijah out of thought concentrated too much on himself to the work of God, which should be handed on in unbroken continuity to others, the old energy returned.

¶ In that brightest of books, the *Introduction à la Vie Dévote*, S. Francis de Sales, who in early life had endured a severe trial of religious depression and mental struggle, wrote: "If, after all, you receive no comfort, do not be troubled, however great the dryness, but continue to keep yourself in a devout posture before God. How many courtiers go a hundred times a year into the prince's presence-chamber, without hopes of speaking to him, but only to be seen by him, and pay him their duty? So ought we, my dear Philothea, to come to holy prayer purely and simply to pay our duty, and testify our fidelity." Equally wise is the advice of Thomas à Kempis, "to flee to humble and outward works: and refresh thyself with good actions; to expect with firm confidence the coming of the Lord and visitation from above." . . . "For I will cause thee to forget thy toils, and to enjoy inward quietness; I will spread before thee the pleasant meadows of the Scriptures: that with heart enlarged thou mayest begin to run the way of my commandments." It is through a trial like this, as through deep sorrow in other ways, that we learn to "bear one another's burdens," and to find, not only "in

[1] P. B. Power, *The "I Wills" of the Psalms*, 207.

the pleasant meadows of the Scriptures," but also in reliance on the intercessions of the Church, through the merits of its Head, sources of comfort and refreshment hitherto unknown, although so close to us.[1]

3. However common and distressing may be the infirmity of doubt, it is exceedingly simple both to understand and to deal with. It requires only the application of common sense for us to see that we know enough to be able to overcome the weakness by degrees. The difficulty, in short, *solvitur ambulando;* as Archbishop Temple used to say, "Is it impossible? then make it possible by doing it". No revelation from God is needed for this purpose. We require simply (1) to pray for help before beginning; (2) to grasp the principles of prayer as taught in the Lord's Prayer; (3) the discipline of practice; (4) patience with the slowness of our progress; (5) perseverance; (6) to recognize that wrestling effort is an inherent characteristic of prayer in the Bible, from Gen. xxxii. 36 (Jacob and the Angel) to the word "strive" in Eph. vi. 18, and Rev. vi. 10; (7) to remember that genuine dissatisfaction in such a matter is a sign of life, and common to all prayerful people; (8) certainty of conviction that the promises attached to earnest effort in prayer will not fail.

¶ The mind of the sincerest, I will not venture to say of the maturest, for that I am not competent to speak of, will be sometimes, to a certain degree, less luminous, it may be, beclouded; the question will be then, what is the path to comfort? I say, and say with all my soul, . . . prayer. Prayer, persevered in, until the mind is sensibly reinstated, and the former light renewed.[2]

¶ "I fought my doubts," Sir Thomas Browne says in the *Religio Medici*, "not in a martial posture, but on my knees."

IV.

Pride.

1. We are very slow to learn the lesson of our own utter inability. Pride is a very dull scholar in the school of experience;

[1] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 304.

[2] *Correspondence between John Jebb and Alexander Knox*, ii. 140.

and often and often she will beat about, seeking for every possible excuse for the failure of which she herself is the sole cause. We feel at some time, perhaps, that our hearts are prompted by an earnest desire to pray. We become for the moment keenly alive to our own wants; but when we attempt to pray, we find the edge of that sense of need is gone. The heart appears full, but when we kneel we find it empty. Like Tantalus of old, we anticipate a rich draught of the brimming flood; but as we stoop to drink, it is gone. Vexed and disappointed we murmur at our privation, but are too blind to see its cause. We cannot see that our own self-conceit lies at the root of our failure. We think we can do it of ourselves—we anticipate rich heart communion; but we are miserably mistaken, because we do not realize that we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but that our whole sufficiency is of God. We forget that it is ever true, and must continue to be the heart experience of all the sons of God till the end of time, that we know not what we should pray for as we ought. We forget that, for real, successful prayer, a Divine energy of prayer must quicken our hearts; that the Holy Spirit of God must help our infirmities, making intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

¶ A full hand cannot take Christ.[1]

¶ It is very significant that in Solomon's catalogue of "six things which the Lord hateth, yea, seven which are an abomination unto him," the very foremost place is given to what few men would consider a sin at all—"a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that are swift to run to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren". A black catalogue that! most of them sins that all men will condemn, and of which most men would be ashamed. But at the very head of the list stands the "proud look"; and as there cannot be a proud look unless there is a proud heart behind it, it is the hidden pride of heart that here is stamped with the foremost reprobation of God.[2]

2. We are much inclined to self-dependence. We would do God's work without God's help. In our church capacity we have

[1] A. A. Bonar, *Wayside Wells*, 177.
[2] G. H. Knight, *In the Secret of His Presence*, 62.

sometimes, as we think, knowledge and wisdom, and skill, and plans, and organizations, and numbers, and pecuniary resources, and we are tempted to trust to these; and in our more private and personal capacity we are ready so to think of what we can do, and of what we will do, as to overlook what God must do. We go to God's own work as if it were altogether man's work. We engage in it in a spirit of self-dependence. But when we do Christian work, we are not only dependent upon God; it is indispensable also that we should exercise that dependence, that we should express it in prayer. This is as much a condition of His co-operation with us as is the use of the power which He has committed to our hands. He gives of His Spirit to those that ask Him, and He gives of His Spirit in the measure that they ask for that Spirit. He who feels that he is quite equal to the Christian work to which he is called is left by God to his own resources. When we are strong then are we weak; when we are weak then are we strong, for then it is that by faith and prayer we unite ourselves to the strength of God. We are to use our own power in the Christian service, and then we are to put our trust in God's power; we are to do what we can, and when we have done what we can, we are to look and see what God will be pleased to do.

¶ James and John once came to Jesus and made to Him the amazing request that He would place one of them on His right hand and the other on His left hand when He set up His imperial government at Jerusalem! As long as these self-seeking disciples sought only their own glory, Christ could not give the askings of their ambitious hearts. By-and-by, when their hearts had been renewed by the Holy Spirit, and they had become so consecrated to Christ that they were in complete harmony with Him, they were not afraid to pour out their deepest desires. James declares that, if we do not "ask *amiss*," God will "give liberally". John declares that "whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight". Just as soon as those two Christians found their supreme happiness in Christ and His cause they received the desires of their hearts.[1]

3. For true balance of character and to produce the best work in any line, it is necessary for a man to have both humility and

[1] T. L. Cuyler, *Twenty-Two Talks*, 60.

also self-confidence. There is a false humility which weakens a man and unfits him for the duties of life. It is often indistinguishable from moral cowardice, a refusal to put forth the best powers, a slackness of moral tissue which may be as fatal a form of self-indulgence as any other form of it.

As there is a false humility which spoils character and work, so there is an over-weening conceit which is equally weak, and which keeps a man from his true place of usefulness. An exaggerated sense of personal importance, an inordinate ambition for the first place, an egotism which judges of everything according as it affects that sweet gentleman self, a self-pushing, self-advertising spirit which will not enter into anything unless self is to be the first dog in the hunt—that is the other extreme.

¶ There are many cheap and exaggerated reputations in the world; but I am not sure but that the reputation for humility may not be the cheapest of them all in some cases. To get it, you only need to lie low, and say nothing, and never take an independent stand. No useful work is possible from the man who is so mistrustful of himself that he will not even try.[1]

V.

Selfishness.

A spirit of selfishness in prayer will lead to the sense of barrenness. By selfishness in prayer is meant that spirit in prayer which confines all our supplications to our own individual need. It is not that we do not include by name many of our friends and relatives within the circle of our prayers. Of course we all of us do this. But even when we do so, is it not often done in a perfunctory way? Is not the spirit which yearns over them very far removed from us? Is there the presence of that feeling of the Apostle, who described himself as travailing in birth-pangs for those in whose hearts he desired to see Christ formed? And God often visits us with barrenness because we fail to grow in heart-sympathy and Christian longing for the welfare of others. It is the very law of Christ that His love should spread, as it is the law of hydrostatics that pressure should circulate in all directions through a volume of water; and when we in a niggardly

[1] Hugh Black, *University Sermons*, 70.

forgetfulness of others violate that law, we are met with the punishment of a straitening in ourselves.

¶ Is there any heaven surpassing in its sheer blessedness that which John Masefield in *The Everlasting Mercy* has described as flashing into a humble, seeking soul:—

> I knew that Christ had given me birth
> To brother all the souls on earth,
> And every bird and every beast
> Should have the crumbs broke at the feast.[1]

1. How shall we guard ourselves against the sin of selfishness in prayer? Just as we guard ourselves against unreality or formality in prayer—by going out into the battle to fight for God. He who is most earnest and active in labour to win souls to Christ is sure to be most earnest in prayer for them. The surest remedy for selfishness is to give a man something to do for others; and so it is with prayer. As regards intercessory prayer, one important matter is to have a great deal to pray about, and that we shall find in active service for God.

¶ The whole matter is in a nut-shell. That prayer is the most acceptable which leaves the best results. Results, I mean, in actions. That is true prayer. Not certain gusts of softness and feeling, and nothing more.[2]

2. Selfishness in prayer besets particularly Christians who are advanced in religious life, and to whom prayer has become a constant or at least a frequent exercise. This danger is one that belongs especially to intense natures; but all natures are more or less subject to it. We should be in such sympathy with God that we should have much to pray for touching the honour and glory of His name; we should be in such sympathy with Divine Providence that we should have much to offer thanksgiving for, in the events that every day transpire round about us; and we should be in such sympathy with our fellow-men that we should find in their wants much subject-matter for petition.

¶ I have often been suspicious of people who have come to me saying that they had made some specific subject a matter of prayer, and had been told by God what to do. I have feared

[1] J. Brierley, *Religion and To-Day*, 252. [2] Santa Teresa.

that instead of praying to God to clarify their mental vision, and deliver them from the selfishness that might warp their judgment, they have prayed until they were able to persuade themselves that the thing they wanted to do was right. And I can remember cases in which the results were very sad. How liable we all are to self-delusion, and to the running into extremes! No doubt there are times when a man, finding himself unable to arrive at a settled judgment, has to wait for the openings and leadings of God's providence.[1]

¶ Spiritual writers sometimes speak of "a ladder of prayer," by which they mean that there are stages in the grace of prayer through which a man passes in his growth in the spiritual life. The first stage in prayer with most of us was possibly a cry for escape from some *external* evil, some disease or disaster, either of our own or of one dear to us. There will follow on that a cry for deliverance from sin, or for forgiveness. In this second stage there may be present in the mind a fear of punishment and little more, or a fear of exposure. At any rate the man is in both these cases dealing with God; he has come into God's presence; his danger or his sin has brought him there. To God he has not come perhaps for God's sake, but only for his own; still he has come, and that is much. The next stage is a prayer for virtue or grace. He has seen the worth and beauty of goodness, and desires it. He has seen it in the life of some man or woman, or has read it in story; or it may be that the sight of it has arisen in his heart as if through inspiration; and it holds him as by a power from without. He now prays for it, and prays for it as the chief good of life. He asks it as a thing desirable for him to possess. This is not selfishness, and yet there is in it a thought of the self. He may call it a desire for that self-realization which in a true sense is one of the ends of his existence; he is seeking that which is best for him, and which it will be best for the world (so far as he can help it) that he should become. But nevertheless there is present in the thought of his attaining the grace he prays for the thought also of a "culture" into which he is pressing. The next stage lifts the mind away from any thought of self at all; it is a desire that the will of God be done. To mortal man, however, the will of God continually presents itself as something to be *borne;* a trial or tribulation, a loss irreparable, a sorrow from which there can now be no escape. At first he prayed that it might not come, but now he prays that he have strength to bear it. And that not in the meaning that the

[1] *John Brash: Memorials and Correspondence*, 157.

sorrow should not be too painful, but that he do not rebel or murmur against the wisdom and the love of God in sending it. The other thought contained in the prayer that the will of God be done is this: that he take up the will of God into his own will, and make it his life's work to carry it through. It is not presented to his mind as a commandment coming upon him from without, but as an end, a career, a vast and abiding ambition that God prevail and God's purpose be accomplished. It is a great thing, the greatest thing in the world for him to help in this grand, this age-long, this ever-conquering purpose of God. It is perhaps only a richer strain in this consecration of a man's life that it becomes his chief joy; he delights and revels in the carrying of this ambition out. My strength and refreshment of soul, he says, come from my work in this. "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." This is the spirit in which the mighty things in the world's history have been achieved. Men in the heroic times did not think of themselves at all, or of their future, or even of their soul's salvation; they thought of the will of God, and the necessity that they do it here and now, and at any cost. For this the Christian prays. He prays that this will be done without any regard for him at all. If we were to ask him, he would say that he does not believe that it can involve his final destruction, for the God whose will he prays may be done is a God of love who will somehow save His people. But in his prayer he is not thinking of that, but of something vaster, the great universe of men; and he desires that God take His own way whatever it may mean for him, and carry His will through at any cost to him. Now, there is joy, unspeakable joy, to a man in this complete emergence from the thought of himself; and that joy (as we see from the lives of some) will rise up to a note of triumph in the contemplation of the final victory of God over all evil, and the bringing of all His children home at last.[1]

If when I kneel to pray,
With eager lips I say,
"Lord, give me all the things that I desire,
Health, wealth, fame, friends, brave heart, religious fire,
The power to sway my fellow-men at will,
And strength for mighty works to banish ill,"
In such a prayer as this
The blessing I must miss.

[1] George Steven, *The Psychology of the Christian Soul*, 289.

Or, if I only dare
To raise this fainting prayer:—
"Thou seest, Lord, that I am poor and weak,
And cannot tell what things I ought to seek:
I therefore do not ask at all, but still
I trust Thy bounty all my wants to fill,"
My lips shall thus grow dumb,
The blessing shall not come.

But, if I lowly fall,
And thus in faith I call:—
"Through Christ, O Lord, I pray Thee give to me,
Not what I would, but what seems best to Thee,
Of life, of health, of service, and of strength,
Until to Thy full joy I come at length,"
My prayer shall then avail,
The blessing shall not fail.

XV.

Encouragements to Prayer.

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Encouragements to Prayer.

If prayer has its difficulties, it has also its encouragements. And there is no better way of solving the one than by turning to the other. Of its encouragements the promises are greatest and best. But there are others. Let us, first of all, see how the name of God is revealed as an encouragement in prayer.

I.

The Name of God.

The promises of God speaking in the hearts of the psalmists over, possibly, a period of eight centuries, were no uncertain sounds, no dreams which vanish "when one awaketh," no mirage of the desert promising refreshment and satisfaction which are illusory. Attested by inward experience, they have been fulfilled in the historic fact of the Incarnation, and the consequent communion and fellowship of God with man, and man with man in the mystical body of His Son. So for the expression of their own highest Christian convictions, the members of the Catholic Church have from generation to generation used their inspired language. Within the Divine Society, in which the Holy Spirit forms "the mind of Christ," teaching us to pray aright, the Psalms live on, supported by both of the forms of testimony —derived from inward experience and from outward history— which are needed for complete assurance.

Now the psalmists knew God as the Living One; they were stirred to praise and thank Him because they believed not only that in prayer their souls were in contact with Him, but also that He delighted in such contact; they were morally certain that He meant their prayer to be answered, and, through the answered prayer, to work out in His Church and each faithful member of it His eternal purposes. To His attributes their appeal is constant

as a reason for His hearing prayer and granting our requests. Thus the chief among all prayers for pardon is based upon the revelation of the Divine character granted to Moses on Mount Sinai :—

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness:
According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

The ground of prayer for protection is discovered in the same great revelation by another psalmist, who expects that God, being in character what He declared Himself to be, will be gracious to him, and show him "a token for good". Another appeals in a cry for forgiveness and restoration to the Divine attributes of "faithfulness" and "righteousness" as a reason why his prayer should be answered :—

"Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications:
In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness."

Again, in the intercession of Daniel the prophet we have a signal illustration of petitions founded on this warrant. He "understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem". But the prophet does not repose his trust only on the promise; he urges that which is due to the Divine character: "Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

II.

The History of Israel

1. The history of Israel is compact of prayer. "That tide of fire, the Assyrian and his army," rolled back by the prayer of the prophet Amos, spoken as he marked the slow advance of

the coming judgment, "O Lord God, cease, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small," is only one example out of many. It is, indeed, the simple truth to say that the Hebrews have taught the world how to pray. Prayer is an instinct of the unsophisticated soul. Whether to gods or to saints or to demons or the dead, all nations have prayed. But the prayers differ as the religions differ; and as the Hebrews are the world's acknowledged masters in religion, it is from their prayers that we have by far the most to learn. "Ye shall not pray as the Gentiles do." Hebrew prayer itself underwent development, and the difference that Jesus made was very great; but it is still to the Bible, to the Old Testament and the New alike, that we must go when we would learn to speak with God. Old Testament aspirations were fulfilled rather than abolished by Christ. The piety of the millennium which preceded Him has a value of its own, and a value even for us. For more than twenty centuries men have lifted up their hearts to God in the words of the Hebrew Psalter, because there they have found their deepest thoughts most finely interpreted and expressed; and the older the world grows, the more profound and wonderful seems that prayer which Christ taught His disciples. These things can never be outgrown or superseded; they are eternal, because they are simple and true. We know not how to pray as we ought, but the Bible may be our teacher and guide. For prayer, though in its nature spontaneous, may be directed; though an instinct, it may, like any other instinct, be trained. "One of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray." So prayer can be taught, and the modern Church has much to gain by recalling her prayers to the Biblical standard.

2. One characteristic—perhaps the most prominent and notable of all the characteristics which distinguish the Bible prayers from those we find in other devotional books—is that they contain so much of narrative. We observe this in the Psalms. A large proportion of these call to remembrance events in the past history of Israel; and certain of the longest are historical from beginning to end—historical, be it observed, without ceasing to be really prayers. The same feature is found in the prayers scattered through the other books of Scripture. The explanation

is not far to seek. God's works, next to His Word, are the authentic revelation of His mind, and the devout commemoration of them is fitted to strengthen faith exceedingly, and to encourage in prayer. The worshippers beseech the Divine help, because it has already in the past been so signally manifested; or they offer their thanks for the Divine guidance of the nation in ages long gone by; or they look at the sins which they confess in the light of the ancient goodness of God, of which they have proved themselves so miserably unworthy. But the striking thing is this: they do not content themselves with vague assertions of that goodness; they relate it definitely—sometimes briefly, and sometimes very elaborately—to their national history. It is done briefly, but characteristically, by Jehoshaphat when, in his prayer for help in battle, he says, "Didst not thou, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?" Similarly, Judas Maccabæus, before a battle, begins his prayer for victory thus: "O Saviour of Israel, who didst quell the violence of the mighty man by the hand of thy servant David, and didst give the host of aliens into the hands of Jonathan, the son of Saul, and his armour-bearer." David, in a prayer of thanksgiving, is also represented as recalling the goodness of God in the time of the Exodus: "What one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem unto himself for a people, and to make him a name, and to do terrible things for thy land, before thy people, whom thou didst redeem to thee out of Egypt, from the nations and their gods?"

¶ A very beautiful and striking illustration of this phenomenon occurs in the prayer of thanksgiving which is offered for the first-fruits. The prayer at first seems curiously out of place in this connexion: it is a tolerably minute summary of the facts of Israel's early history. "A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and he became there a nation, great, mighty and populous. And the Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage; and we cried unto Jehovah, the God of our fathers, and Jehovah heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression; and Jehovah brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched

arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders; and he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey." Then at the end come the simple words: "And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground, which thou, O Jehovah, hast given me."

In many ways, this prayer is most characteristic and instructive. Behind it lies the thought: "We love him, because he first loved us". It further suggests that gratitude must be expressed, not in word only, but also in deed. It links the ages each to each: God did that then, therefore we do this now. It keeps alive the memory of the gracious past. But the point with which we are immediately concerned is that the goodness of God is vividly brought before the mind of the worshipper by a historical recital. The great words "goodness" and "loving-kindness" were not allowed to degenerate into empty phrases; they were filled with radiant and indisputable historical fact. So much is this the case that some of the longer Psalms practically form a brief history of early Israel. The past was ever with them: it was kept alive not only in history, but in prayer.[1]

¶ A nation whose history, like our own, is brightened with a long series of blessings and deliverances received from God, should keep His great acts in mind, and should gather encouragement from them to hope in God, and cast itself on Him when dangers befall and darken all the sky. And it is the same with the Church. Those who are most familiar with the history of the Church, unless they have been undevout and careless readers indeed, will be the least ready to look forward with gloomy forebodings regarding the time to come. Remembering the years of the right hand of the Most High, they will confide in Him that, when tempests and dangers have done their work in humbling men for their sins, and stirring them up to seek God, they will be stilled, and the sun will shine forth again.[2]

III.

The Life of Christ.

1. The life of Christ is the centre and core of the Bible, it is also the centre and core of the creation; it should become the centre and core of each individual life. "Let thy servant be exercised in thy life" is the desire which runs through the

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 183.
[2] W. Binnie, *Sermons*, 116.

Imitatio Christi. That *Imitatio* has been an aid to many in realizing the end, but it pales in importance before the Four Gospels themselves; and if only we can find the right use of the Gospels, we may reach that goal which Thomas à Kempis and all the followers of Christ have desired.

¶ The visitor to a certain church in Rome will be shown by the attendant priest a marble slab with two rather formless indentations impressed upon it. "These," the priest will say, pointing to the depressions in the stone, "are the footprints of the Blessed Master." The footprints, of course, are not genuine; if they were, even a good Protestant might wish to place his feet where the feet of the Lord had stood. Spiritually, this was the ambition of the Victorines: it is the ambition of all the saints. For *every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.* Mr. Standfast, the Pilgrim, may speak in the name of all who walk in the process of Christ: "I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of, and wherever I have seen the print of His shoe on the earth, there have I coveted to set my foot too".[1]

2. Now the most striking of the features of Christ's life is that atmosphere of another world which unobtrusively but unmistakably pervades it. Consider how remarkable this is; how a wider and a higher realm is from the first brought in to explain and to redeem this transitory life. As a boy, He is conscious that He must be about the business of His Heavenly Father; as a man entering on His task, He sees the heavens opened, and hears the authenticating voice so vividly that He makes others share the vision and the message. He comes at once preaching the Kingdom of Heaven; He is certain that the heavenly atmosphere is already upon earth, and equally certain that it is to become more diffused and more recognized. His whole activity is directed to bringing the heavenly vision and power to redress the wrongs, the sorrows, and the sins, of earth. His lips are seldom opened but there comes out some parable of the Kingdom of Heaven, or some word which breathes heavenly power and insight into the shadowed hearts of men. And if we have attentively followed the records of the brief life, and of the portentous death to which the stupidity and sin of men subjected this messenger from another sphere, we are not surprised to read that

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *Waymarks in the Pursuit of God*, 206.

death was not able to hold Him, but that, breaking the bars of the tomb, He returned naturally to the heaven whence He came.

¶ Jeremy Taylor, in his *Life of Christ*, gives a noble example of the use which may be made of the Gospels. Taking each section of the story in detail, he makes the most searching application of it to the practice of the Christian life, adding a prayer to be used for the assimilation of the truth which in each section has been elicited. One who should faithfully follow this great work day by day, learning the lesson and offering the prayer, would assuredly be exercised in the life of Christ, and would make much progress in the imitation of the great example. But there is little hope that the busy mind of the twentieth century will be disposed to follow the elaborate and discursive method of the seventeenth century. The sustained eloquence, the vast learning, and the spiritual fervour which pervade the pages of Jeremy Taylor will delight every reader, but will not induce many to read.[1]

3. Jesus set a great example in prayer. He had a real and intense prayer-life, great in its dependence and great in its earnestness. He prayed when He had special need of God, before the great events of His life, and before His great works. But He also prayed in intercession for His disciples and for future believers, for Peter and for the soldiers at the cross. He prayed before some great experience came to Him from without. Therein He was in line with the instinct of all of us. If a man stands at one of life's great beginnings, there are words of prayer upon his lips. And He prayed before the output of energy. Great men of action, as well as men of thought, have found the need of prayer. But also, and particularly, in His intercedings, Jesus acted on that type of prayer which involves all the difficulties for modern minds.

(1) *It is a source of intellectual rest to see Jesus in prayer* and to listen to the tender pleading tones of His supplications. Sometimes we are tempted to ask,—who indeed is not?—Is it worth while to pray? Can it do any good? Is not this an ordered universe, based on law, administered in obedience to law by One who is Himself the Lawmaker and Lawgiver, and the very Fountain of all order, and who is not likely to have left room

[1] R. F. Horton, *The Open Secret*, 138.

to deviate from His regulations in compliance with the expression of our confused and bewildered desires? Is He not bound in chains so inexorable that all asking and receiving are absolutely and for ever shut out? So it often seems, and yet He prays; and therefore I may. He, the Son of the Father, who comes from the bosom of the Father, from the deepest intimacies of the Divine, who knew the Father as no one else ever can—He prays, not once or twice, as if by accident, but often and long, and specially and with much feeling, in the crises of His work and mission.

Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervour of His prayer.

¶ I cannot answer all the curious questions of the brain concerning prayer and law; not half of them, indeed; and I will not attempt it; but like Knox, I will cast my anchor here, in this revealing fact that He, the Holiest of the holy, and the Wisest of the wise, He prays; therefore I am assured this anchorage of Divine example will hold the vessel in the tossings of the wildest sea of doubt, and that I shall be safe as He was if the vessel itself is engulfed in the waves of suffering and sorrow. His act is an argument. His prayer is an inspiration. His achievements are the everlasting and all-sufficient vindication of prayer.[1]

(2) But secondly, *it is a revelation of the truest sources of moral power to see Jesus the Son of God*, in communion with His Father in this the chiefest crisis of His life. Indeed, it is this urgent need of immediate help He puts in the very foreground as His plea for praying at all. Each opening word indicated the hunger of His soul for strength. He says, "Father, the hour is come". He is a child, and a child in sore trouble; and to whom should He go if not to His Father? And what should He do in this dark day if not talk to Him and tell all He feels and hopes and endures? The relation vindicates the fullest, freest speech, invites the most outspoken confidence. He is the Son of the Father; come from His bosom, and come to do His will; has found His meat, His very life and its nourishment, in this close and most endearing relation; and therefore, with a naturalness that is itself an argument, He begins in this dark night with the word, so sweet, so strong, so revealing, "Father, the great dread

[1] John Clifford, *Social Worship*, 54.

hour has come; hold Thou Me up; keep Me true, help and glorify Thy Son".

¶ There are on record three prayers of our Divine Lord, each of which presents Him to us in a different aspect. In one of them He appears in His human soul, shrinking with all the sensitiveness of innocence from the cruel necessity imposed on Him by the work of human redemption which He had undertaken; "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt". In another He appears as a Prophet or Teacher, instructing His disciples after what manner they are to approach God, He Himself not being involved in the prayer which He dictates; for how could He who was "holy, harmless, undefiled"—who has no trespasses—pray, "Forgive us our trespasses"? This is the Lord's Prayer. In the third prayer, He appears as a Priest interceding for His people; He embraces both Himself and them in His petition, asking for His own glorification and for theirs with Him. This is the prayer in the seventeenth chapter of St. John, usually called the Great High-priestly Prayer. Thus we have from the Lord's lips one prayer for Himself exclusively, one prayer for His Church exclusively, and one prayer for Himself and His Church together.[1]

4. He who paces along this wondrous way of the life of the Son of Man, making it his example and his pillar of cloud by day, his meditation and his pillar of fire by night, is brought to a still surer conviction, for He whom he follows approaches to a more intimate intercourse—Christ is formed within, and is the clearer evidence of the Christ whose life was once lived without. But our devotion can hardly proceed unless it throbs with the desire to make known our Lord, who is its object, to every human soul. With what countenance can we worship Him, and with what words can we show our obedience, if we do not share His longing for the extension of the Kingdom? And in this portion He reminds us that we may promote His object not only by going as His messengers, but also by praying that more labourers may be sent into the harvest. Here is a direction for our constant and believing prayers, and we are to grasp the thought that to pray in the name of Jesus is to pray for the things which He desires or commands.

[1] E. M. Goulburn, *The Lord's Prayer*, 2.

¶ I ask you to realize to yourselves that our own missionaries are very apostles who are ever pleading with you for help in the discharge of their Divine office, while they set before you the ends which seem to lie within their range. I ask you to see a fresh Corinth, no less beset by idolatry and unbelief and corruption than that Corinth from which St. Paul wrote to his Macedonian converts, in Calcutta, or Benares, or Cawnpore, or Delhi, or Lahore. I ask you to compare your own spiritual privileges with those of the Christians of Thessalonica, your freedom, your resources, your knowledge, your obligations, with theirs. And then when you have done this, when you have felt who are the pleaders now and what is the cause, I ask you if you can put aside the petition which comes to you in the apostolic words, "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of God may run and be glorified"; if you can decline the fellowship which is offered you in making known the Gospel by which you live, or if you are not rather grieved that more is not demanded of you to whom much has been given.[1]

¶ It is said that the way-worn labourers of Iona found their burdens grow lighter when they reached the most difficult part of their journey because the secret prayers of their aged master Columba met them there. I can well believe the story; and such comfort of unspoken sympathy the Church at home can give to the isolated missionary. If when he is saddened by the spectacle of evil which has been accumulated and grown hard through countless generations; if when his words find no entrance because the very power of understanding them is wanting; if when he watches his life ebb and his work remain undone and almost unattempted, he can turn homeward with the certain knowledge that in England unnumbered fellow-labourers are striving from day to day to lighten his sorrows and to cheer his loneliness, I can well believe that he too will find that refreshment and joy in the consciousness of deep human fellowship, in our Lord and Saviour, which will nerve him for new and greater toil; that he will be strong again with the strength of holy companionship and courageous with the solace of hope. "You intercede for us, I know," are words which I read this afternoon in a letter from one of our friends in a post of singular difficulty. God deals with us as men and helps us through men.[2]

[1] Brooke Foss Westcott, *Lessons from Work*, 204. [2] *Ibid.*, 208.

IV.

The Promises.

1. Personal conviction of the power and influence of prayer can be gained only by a man who himself lives in prayer. It is attainable in the same way as one becomes convinced of the love of another, namely, by living along with him. And a proof that we are not the victims of any form of self-deception is afforded us in the harmonious testimony of all those who have been thoroughly versed and experienced in the world of prayer. Every actual experience of prayer is a Yea and Amen to the promises of the Lord, to His positive declaration that God hears prayer. He said: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened". When describing the woe falling on the whole Jewish nation at the destruction of Jerusalem, He said to His disciples: "And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be." Here, therefore, the Saviour charges His disciples to pray for a mitigation of impending calamities. Would He have so charged them if there were no answering of prayer? When He saw the people, and had compassion on them because they were faint and scattered, like sheep without a shepherd, He said to the disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest." Would He have made such a prayer binding on us if He had deemed it unmeaning? Finally, He assured His people that where two or three of them agree to ask anything it shall be done for them by their Heavenly Father, and then added, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Whoever believes in the Saviour at all has, along with faith in the truth of His sayings, the pledge that God answers prayer.

¶ To mitigate or ease the sorowis of our woundit conscience, two plaisteris hath oure maist prudent Phisitioun provydit to gif us incouragement to pray (notwithstanding the knawledge of

offences committit), that is, a precept and a promeis. The precept or commandement to pray is universall, frequentlie inculcat and repeatit in Godis Scriptures: "Aske, and it salbe gevin unto yow". "Call upon me in the day of trubill." "Watche and pray that ye fall not into temptatioun." "I command that ye pray ever without ceassing." "Mak deprecationis incessabill, and gif thankis in all thingis." Whilk commandementis, who so contempneth or dispyseth, doith equallie sin with him that doith steill; for in this commandement thow sall not steill is a precept *negative;* sa thou sall pray is a commandement *affirmative.* And God requyreth equall obedience of and to all his commandementis.

To this commandement he addeth his maist undoutit promeis in many places, "Aske, and ye sall receave; seik, and ye sall find". And by the Prophet Jeremie, God sayeth, "Ye sall call upon me, and I sall heir yow". "Ye sall seik and sall find me." And by Esay, he sayeth, "May the Father forget his naturall son, or the Mother the chyld of hir wombe? and althocht thai do, yit sall I not forget suche as call upon me." And heirto correspond and agrie the wordis of Jesus Chryst, saying, "Yf ye being wickit can gif gud giftis to your children, muche more my heavinlie Father sall gif the Halie Gaist to thame that aske him." And that we suld not think God to be absent, or not to heir us, accuseth Moses, saying, "Thair is no natioun that have thair Godis so adherent, or neir unto thame as oure God, whilk is present at all oure prayeris". Also the Psalmist "Neir is the Lord unto all that call upon him in veritie". And Chryst sayeth, "Whairsoever tuo or thrie ar gatherit together in my name, thair am I in the middis of thame."[1]

¶ No one who knows the largeness and liberality of the Divine promises will complain of their being scanty. The roll of the promises let down from heaven is more full of varied food for the spirit of man than that great sheet which the Apostle saw in vision was full of varied food for his body. They are a goodly body of most gracious store for equipping the immortal spirit for its wilderness-journey, and, moreover, like the ark of Noah, containing the seeds and rudiments and enjoyments in that new world where she is soon to rest for ever; or, according to St. Peter, they are like so many beacons lighted up in the dark, wild, and untrodden future, whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts. And, to carry the figure a little further, in each of these enlightened beacons resides an oracle from the Most High to guide the goings forth

[1] *The Works of John Knox*, iii. 91.

of the believer's hopes and purposes. In sight of these he is not far from tidings of the land to which he sojourns; out of sight of them, he is guideless, aimless, and helpless, in the midst of a wide and waste ocean of uncertainty.[1]

2. The manner of God's dealing is largely by promise, and on the ground of that promise must we deal with Him. From the beginning it has been so. God's covenant has been evermore a covenant of promise. Not a contract or compact; not, Bring this, and I will accept; not, Do this, and I will bless; but rather, I promise, therefore live—I promise, therefore love! The covenant itself was promise. And that prayer which is based on knowledge must ever on that account be based on promise.

The promise is no single separate utterance; no number, no multitude, of bare literal engagements, which must be found somewhere in the bond, and then rehearsed, by page and clause, as the justification of the particular demand. The promise of God, like the revelation of God, like the counsel of God, like the character of God, is at once ample to magnificence and simple even to unity. One broad, deep, majestic stream, like the river which went forth from Eden, compasses all God's earth, and waters on every side the garden of His creation. It is the declaration of His will that all should be saved. It is the cry from the temple-court on the last and great day of the feast, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink". "There is a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early." "This is the will of God, even your sanctification."

¶ In going to God, we greatly honour Him, when we remind Him of His promises, and declare our entire dependence on them. See the example of Jacob, who for his power in prayer was surnamed Israel. He had been assured, in a dream, that God would be with him in all places, and never leave him till He had fulfilled to him His promises in their fullest extent. Full twenty years afterwards, Jacob, in a season of great distress, reminded God of this promise, saying, "O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee:

[1] *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, iii. 9.

deliver me, I pray thee, for thou saidst, I will surely do thee good". Thus we should bear in mind the promises which God has given us, and present before Him those which are in a more peculiar manner suited to our state. This will give us confidence before God; and it will secure to us infallibly an answer of peace: for "this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him".[1]

¶ If God had promised nothing, we could have expected nothing: and if His promises were not steadfast, we might have been deceived in our expectation. Therefore it is that the first revelation was a promise, and the revelations to Noah and to Abraham were promises, and the law was a prefiguration of good things to come, and the prophecies are dark declarations of the events of promises, and the gifts of God's Spirit, with all the attainments of the Christian life, are promises, and the Apocalypse is a promise extending to the end of time; and when it comes to pass that there are no promises unaccomplished, then will prayer cease; but that will never be, till prayer and all other instruments of grace be rendered useless by the revelation of glory, when instead of faith shall come honour, and in place of hope the things hoped for.[2]

¶ John Bunyan spoke of "leaping into the bosom of the promise". They find a tranquil refuge who so do. Take example of Bunyan, my friend! When prayer seems impossible set the promise of God before your eyes and leap into its sheltering bosom. Peter speaks of God's "precious and exceeding great promises," and that is characterization incomparable because inspired of God. God's promises are all "precious" and all "exceeding great". Nor is this least true of the promises which relate to prayer. What strong encouragement the promises give to the prayer of faith! The practical difficulty of prayer would melt away did we but avail ourselves of the resource of promise which God has given us in the Scriptures. I am ever and anon saying despondently, "How can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord?" because I fail to remember His promises.[3]

3. Last of all, our prayer should be in line with God's promises. Not every desire is a fit subject for prayer. No one would pray

[1] C. Simeon, *Works*, iii. 264.
[2] *The Collected Writings of Edward Irving*, iii. 7.
[3] Dinsdale T. Young, *The Enthusiasm of God*, 198.

a sinful wish; there are desires which, like birds of evil omen, shun, of themselves, the light of God. A prayer might be sincere, in so far as it breathed a wish, and yet conscience itself might condemn it as unfit for God's hearing. When we pursue and ponder this distinction—and it is an important one—we shall find no rest for our reflections till we reach this point, that promise is the chart and rudder and compass of supplication; that only such things as God has promised are safe and fitting topics for His people's prayers.

We are not counselling that poor and servile use of the word of promise which would turn the texts of the Bible into a string of engagements and compacts, which are to be urged, as it were, and pleaded, singly and severally, as making God man's debtor, and false if He pays not. The Bible is not thus indexed and labelled for quotation, nor is the free Spirit thus to be tied and fettered by the lifeless letter. Away with such uses of the Bible as would make it over again a mere Decalogue of conditions and precepts, instead of a fresh rustling breeze, sweeping with health and fragrance over the dry arid wastes of man's servitude and man's corruption. Prayer opens an outlet for the promises, removes the hindrances in the way of their execution, puts them into working order, and secures their gracious ends.

¶ When you examine the utterances of Christ with regard to prayer, you find that they consist of large general promises, subsequently defined and made more exact. "Ask, and ye shall receive." Here is a large general promise. It arrests the attention by its obvious contradiction to facts of experience. It stimulates further inquiry, and further inquiry is met by exacter statements. "Therefore I say unto you, all things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." Again, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you". Once more, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled." When we come to consider them, these further definitions of the conditions of prayer are found to be in close agreement. Thus it is morally impossible to have a real confidence that the things we are asking for shall be certainly received, unless our petitions are grounded

on some real knowledge of the mind and method of God; otherwise asking would be a mere crying for the moon.[1]

¶ Christ's signature is at every promise, His name perfumes each one. They are all "yea" in Him.[2]

[1] C. Gore, *Prayer and the Lord's Prayer*, 15.
[2] A. A. Bonar, *Wayside Wells*, 111.

XVI.

The Perplexities of Prayer.

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THE PERPLEXITIES OF PRAYER.

THERE are few things in the religious life so disquieting as the perplexities of prayer. We make our prayer, earnestly, deliberately; we are sure that what we ask is not plainly against God's will. Sometimes there seems to be no answer at all. We pray and pray, and the heavens seem to be as brass. Sometimes the answer, if it comes, is long deferred. Sometimes, if circumstances that occur be the answer, they are strangely different from what we asked or expected.

1. Now, in entering even a very little way into the perplexed question of denials and delays in prayer, it seems well to touch upon a point too little taken into account in the general Christian mind, that question of the times and seasons which the Father hath left in His own hand, and which we cannot take into ours. "All things," it has been said, "are not possible to all men at all times;" and for want of duly acknowledging this statute of limitation, many devotional books, and a great deal of religious teaching, tend only to bring strain and anguish upon the sincere mind, which feels that it cannot rise to the prescribed level until it is lifted there by God Himself. There come, alike to individuals and to churches, days of refreshing from the Lord, times of visitation which the strongest urgency of the human spirit cannot antedate, but which it is its highest wisdom to meet, so as to be found willing in the day of God's power. If the whole year were one long harvest, where were then the sowing, the patient expectation, the ploughing in the cold? A vintage comes once in a year, a triumph perhaps once in a lifetime. So has the Christian life its seasons, its epochs, its days of benediction. There are times, probably, in the life of every faithful believer, when things long desired and sought after are dropped like golden gifts within his bosom. There are few tried Christians who have not known

times when God, suddenly or gradually, has lifted a weight from off their lives, has brought a power within their souls, has so mitigated some afflictive dispensation as to make that endurable which was previously intolerable, has rendered some long desired and apparently unattainable temporal or spiritual aim possible, practicable, easy. How many blessings at such a season will God, by one sweep of His mighty arm, bring within the soul's grasp! He will at once enlarge the soul's border, and visibly defend the land He has made so broad and fruitful, giving it rest from all its enemies round about. Often in times of great tribulation the prophecy of such a season will be borne like a breath from heaven across the wasted and desolate spirit:—

A little hint to solace woe,
A hint, a murmur breathing low,
I may not speak of what I know.

2. We shall consider three situations separately—(1) no answer, (2) a deferred answer, (3) a different answer. But first of all let us remember that we are not by any means the best judges of what constitutes an answer to prayer. No doubt it must frequently happen that what seems a refusal is really the kindest and best of answers. Let us never forget that the most earnest and intense prayer ever offered in the history of the world was a prayer that seemed to meet with a refusal. Yet in that very prayer, offered in an agony of desire, a New Testament writer assures us that our Lord was heard for His filial piety and submission to His Father's will. Of course, the Father heard those outpoured supplications, felt in His Divine sensibilities the full force of those strong cries and tears; and surely, in this case, as St. John teaches us in all similar cases, with Him to hear was to answer. Did He not answer? Surely the joy that must fill the heart of the Son of Man through ages of gratified benevolence (and this is the highest of all joys), in which He has been, and still is, entitled to carry on His mediatorial work, and prove Himself the Saviour of the lost, is a witness to the fact that, in denying Him what He asked, the Father answered the prayer of His Son much more fully than it would have been answered had that cup passed from His trembling hand. He asked that He might evade the dread

ordeal that lay before Him, that He might escape the pain, the sorrow, the loneliness, the heart-breaking desolation; but He also asked that God's will might be done. The answer came not in His being allowed to escape the sorrow, but in His finding through the sorrow a new and wonderful joy, compared with which even His passion was a "light affliction and but for a moment," however far from being light it was in itself. How much the human Christ gained in His own experience from the fact that the answer came as His Father willed, and not as His own human will would have preferred that it should come!

In the prayers of very many of those who love God, slowly a change is wrought. We begin our life with eager and impatient hearts; and in the impatience and the eagerness our religion on all its sides is likely to share. Our plans and hopes stand clearly before our minds; when danger threatens them, our sense of the danger is acute and vivid. The imminence of the peril, the cruelty of the possible loss, the loveliness of that which seems about to be destroyed, the hopelessness of a future from which those fair forms are gone, or in which those carefully formed plans are to find no realization and have no place—with pitiless clearness all this is present to our minds, and we hasten to God with petitions most definite and most urgent. Just what God should do for us, just what He should do for His Kingdom in this difficult and critical time, we tell Him. And then we wait for the answer, sometimes divided between hope and fear, sometimes in that faith which is ready to think of God as under compulsion to reduce the whole system of nature to anarchy when our hearts are set upon something that we can have only through the shattering of the natural order, and we ask God for it with an undoubting belief that He is going to give it to us—a view of prayer pathetic were it not so splendid, pitiable were it not that it is often held in that simplicity of heart which is the root and beginning of every human excellence. But the God to whom we have prayed is greater than we. His love is a love for individuals; but He sees the part in the whole, and time as eternity. Nature He makes orderly; expressing in it His own rationality, and thereby making possible for us men the development of rational individuality in intelligence, in morals, in the deep affections of a life in which we must help one another as we

can in the presence of vast and inexorable, but not unintelligible, forces. With eternal patience, with a wisdom beyond our earthly comprehension, He works out His vast designs; and into those designs He weaves our lives; so that sometimes the answer we had so eagerly prayed for comes, but sometimes does not come — does not come, because in its place comes something greater, something longer in its process and wider in its issues, leading us out through slow years into fields of life more sober in colour than those we had planned, but greater in labour and deeper in truth.

¶ To her the "special Shewing" came as a gift, unearned, and unexpected: it came in an abundant answer to a prayer for other things needed by every soul. Julian's desires for herself were for three "wounds" to be made more deep in her life: contrition (in sight of sin), compassion (in sight of sorrow), and longing after God: she prayed and sought diligently for these graces, comprehensive as she felt they were of the Christian life and meant for all; and with them she sought to have for herself, in particular regard to her own difficulties, a sight of such truth as it might "behove" her to know for the glory of God and the comfort of men.[1]

I asked for just a crumb of bread.
Within His banquet-hall He spread
A bounteous feast on every side—
My hungry soul was satisfied.

I asked for just a ray of light
To guide me through the gloomy night,
And lo, there shone along my way
The noon-tide glory of the day.

I asked for just a little aid,
As I stood trembling and afraid.
With strength I had not known before
He made me more than conqueror.

I asked for just a bit of love,
For love is sweet. From heaven above
The words came now with meaning new,
"Upon the Cross I died for you".[2]

[1] Grace Warrack, in *Introduction to Julian of Norwich's Revelations of Divine Love*, xxxvii.

[2] Faith Wells, in *The Sunday School Times*, 27th June, 1914.

I.

No Answer.

1. Whether prayer is answered or not is always a matter decided in the last and most important case by the person who prays. In the secret of our own heart is to be found the reason why prayer does or does not receive the response of God. "A man's soul is wont to give him tidings, more than seven watchmen that sit on high on a watch-tower." It is necessary that the verdict be given, not only upon the use of the opportunity of prayer, but upon a right use. Since prayer is a means of the essential discipline of life, the correction and direction of our desires thereby must qualify our expectations. That this or the other impulse of our own will cannot overrule the events of life is a necessary postulate of a Divinely ordered world. Prayer must count for something, but it cannot count for everything. Prayer cannot spell anarchy; yet it may so permeate and colour our life that we may "pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks".

¶ I remember, as a child, putting God to the test. I placed a bright farthing in a drawer, and then knelt down and prayed God to transmute it into a half-sovereign. With trembling eagerness I opened the drawer, and found that the copper was copper still. That was my dawn of scepticism in prayer. Some people seem to remain in that childish attitude all their lives, and the dawn of scepticism waxes to the perfect day.[1]

2. Though we are often unable to give a reason why our prayers are not answered, that is not always so. If we consider the matter carefully we may find that the denial is due to one or other of the following reasons.

(1) Petitions are sometimes denied because if granted they would bring us positive injury. True wisdom, if we had it, would never allow us to be at cross-purposes with God.

> So weak is man,
> So ignorant and blind, that did not God
> Sometimes withhold in mercy what we ask,
> We should be ruined at our own request.

[1] R. F. Horton, *The Prayer-House of God*, 25.

And possibly if we would all think back a little through our own history we could recall some earnest prayer of the heart, some cry of the soul, which later events proved to be against our own best welfare.

¶ There are people who say, "What is the limitation of the promise? If it means anything, it means everything—'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.'" Would you grant your boy's request if he asked for something which you knew to be bad for him? Would a woman give her child a red-hot poker if the little child asked for it? Of course it means that, if it is good for us, and if it is best for us, it will be given, but otherwise it will not be given.[1]

(2) Our prayer is sometimes denied in order that a higher and better blessing may come to us. Earnestly and repeatedly did Paul pray that a certain thorn in his flesh might be taken away; but God let him know it was a thing in which he would some day glory, and when Paul looked back upon it from the close of his life he would tell those gathered about him of the special nearness of God and the presence of Jesus which had been a millionfold sweeter to him than any fleshly ease the removal of that ugly annoying thorn might have brought him.

¶ Sometimes when we have really prayed, for temporal blessings especially, we have been like those who have asked for a penny with just one definite bronze penny in view. We may or may not have received our penny, but if our prayers were from good and sincere hearts, hearts obedient to the supreme will, we have received pounds instead of our penny; and by praying more and more in accord with the Divine will, we may gain by our prayers thousands and millions of pounds, in the long run, for God and humanity.[2]

(3) And still another reason for unanswered prayer is to be found in the inconsistency between our prayers and God's better purposes of wisdom towards others. The unanswered prayer of Moses will illustrate this. It was a bitter blow which kept Moses from entering with Israel into the Land of Promise. So bravely he had defended them, so patiently he had toiled for

[1] A. F. Winnington Ingram, *The Call of the Father*, 74.
[2] W. Arthur Cornaby, *In Touch with Reality*, 248.

them, so earnestly he had prayed and interceded for them, surely he might well expect to enter in. But that little sin excludes him. He prays—he who had obtained in his intercession the turning away of God's wrath from Israel, he who had stood before them in the gap,—he prays now for himself that he may go across and see the glorious land. "But the Lord would not hear me," he says; and why? Not altogether as a punishment for that little sin, but because the granting of that prayer would have been inconsistent with the great system of moral teaching by which God was educating Israel. This inconsistency between the prayer and the Diviner purposes of God's wisdom to Israel he speaks of as the reason for its denial: "The Lord was angry with me for your sakes. The Lord would not hear me."

¶ The good of those who pray could not be accomplished at the expense of those who do not pray,—God could not be God and act thus—but the accomplishment of God's unvarying favour toward all is contingent upon human faith; and when its accomplishment depends, as it does depend in all social things, upon the increase of faith in whole classes of men, it is Divine prescience alone that can foresee the time that will be required. Resignation as to the time of fulfilment is required in the hearts of those who pray for such needful things as depend upon the action of society, but not because God withholds the boon.[1]

3. The perplexity of unanswered prayer is felt most keenly when the prayer is intercessory. How often does it happen that, instead of the heart being cheered, and our confidence strengthened, by the blessed result of intercessory prayer, on the contrary, the very earnestness and faith of our prayer offers an occasion for a particularly severe temptation. A broken-hearted wife, for instance, whose dissolute husband has wrecked the happiness of the home and blighted her whole life, seems to receive absolutely no answer to her agonized entreaty. With strong cries and tears she has pleaded for his salvation, and yet he remains as he was, a curse to his family and his home. What wonder if the enemy takes advantage of her distress to shake her confidence, either in her relations with God, if she is of a timid and despondent temperament, or in God Himself, if she is given to forming hasty

[1] *Christus Futurus*, 63.

conclusions, and is not altogether indisposed to yield to sceptical misgivings?

The answer to these perplexities is to be found in the recognition of the fact that intercessory prayer is a part of Christian work and shares in the limitations that belong to all service on behalf of others. All that the most skilful and gifted worker for God can do is to liberate the Divine power by complying with Divinely appointed conditions of effort. It goes without saying that no man can of himself impart spiritual life, and yet it is the promise of Christ to the true believer that forth from his body shall flow rivers of living water. We do not say that it is of no use to work for souls, because we know that no effort of ours can produce those spiritual results that we long to see, unless not only God shall work through us but man, for whom we work, shall yield to the influence thus brought to bear upon him. We know that it is God's will thus to use our efforts, and that it is our duty to expect, with heartfelt faith, to be used of Him. But when we have done all that love can do, we may fail, even as our Master failed, to carry the day with wilful wayward men, who do always resist alike the Spirit of God and the kindly offices of their fellow-men. Our Lord Himself tells us that He had failed to gather those whom He sought to gather, and yet there was no fault or defect in His service; and if He failed, surely it is not surprising that our poor, imperfect efforts should fail from the same cause, even where the failure is not due to our lack of skill or of earnestness.

If this be so with our spiritually philanthropic efforts, is it a thing to be surprised at that our intercessory prayers should have a like issue? Our efforts are not thrown away because they do not seem to be crowned with the success that we desired. Our Divine Master did not really fail, although He did not accomplish what He had longed to accomplish among His contemporaries. Even so, we may feel assured that no earnest effort for God and good that is wrought in the power of the Holy Ghost will in the end be found to have been destitute of all beneficial consequence. It will, at least, have benefited him who wrought it, if it has benefited no one else. And, analogously, no earnest, believing intercessory prayer will be altogether lost; it must at least contribute to the spiritual development of him who has offered it,

and perhaps as a contribution to the sum total of intercession the wide world over, may have other and far-reaching consequences, of which at present we can scarcely form an idea.

¶ Some months ago an intelligent and devout woman whose daughter had died after a painful illness said to me: "I fear that I have lost my faith in prayer. Once my faith was strong. I used to pray with confidence for anything I needed, believing that if I asked in Jesus's name, and had strong faith, God would give me what I asked for. I had been taught so to pray and believe. When my child was sick I besought God with an agony of desire for her recovery. I asked in Jesus's name. I believed that God would grant my prayer. When the doctor said she could not live I refused to believe him, declaring that God, who had promised to hear my prayer, would surely heal her. I fully believed that in some way God would do what the physicians thought impossible. When she died I was stunned, not merely because of my grief, but because it seemed to me that God had failed me. The faith in which I had been reared, and which, up to that moment, had been for me absolute truth, crumbled into dust. At first I was embittered and hostile. Then I passed into indifference. It was a long time before I could pray at all. Then I gradually resumed the habit of prayer, but never with the old confidence; I pray now because I think it is right to pray, but my unquestioning faith in prayer is gone." This incident, which I believe to be typical, caused me to restudy the question of prayer, for it seemed to me that this woman was a victim of wrong teaching. She had, in a word, been led to substitute faith in prayer for faith in God.[1]

¶ When Captain Hedley Vicars was in the Crimean War, Miss Marshall, the lady to whom he was engaged, and her aunt, Miss Marsh, prayed continually that his life might be spared. He was, as we know, shot; but the ladies came in time to see that after all their prayers were not unanswered, and confessed as much in these words, "We asked life of thee, and thou gavest him long life, even for ever and ever".[2]

II.

Deferred Answer.

Properly speaking, then, there is no such thing as unanswered prayer, if the conditions of true prayer are fulfilled. No doubt

[1] C. W. McCormick, *The Heart of Prayer*, 5.
[2] E. J. Hardy, *Doubt and Faith*, 151.

men may utter words which are called prayer, and there may be no response. But real prayer must always be answered—answered in some way, answered at some time. Our prayers cannot lie in God's presence like letters on the table of a busy or neglectful man. He never said to any son of Jacob, "Seek ye me in vain". In all labour there is profit, and this labour of prayer must be the most profitable of all toils, when the soil in which we sow is God. We do not read in Scripture of a single unanswered prayer offered up by any of His people. It is true the special petition was sometimes denied, but even then it was granted in some higher form than the suppliant dreamt of. Even though Moses, so habitually successful in his supplications, was denied in his request to go up with his people to the Promised Land, yet how wondrously was his prayer answered. Not only was he permitted to see the inheritance of Israel from the top of Pisgah, but ages afterwards he visited it in the company of Elijah, and stood on the Holy Mount with Jesus Himself. Who then can venture to say that the prayer of Moses, which seemed to be denied, was overlooked or forgotten? Therefore we assert that there is no such thing as unanswered prayer, and that when prayer seems unanswered, the answer is only the more wonderful and glorious.

But God does certainly delay the answer to prayer, and this causes surprise. We know it is God's will to give us these things, and we may pray without limitation. Why, then, the delay?

1. The difficulty is, without doubt, a serious one. It is not only that, in itself, the delay causes disappointment, but to minds untrained in their thoughts of the attributes and purposes of God, and therefore unable to grasp any larger view of His working in the world, an answer long-deferred seems to be inconsistent with His love. To minimize such a difficulty, either in our own case or in that of others, is not really the way to meet it. But it may be pointed out that we have had full warning of this trial from the Incarnate Lord, whose love is proved by the sacrifice of Himself; in His own human experience He has met the trial, and can therefore sympathize; we have from His lips an assurance that an answer will come: "Shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night, and he is longsuffering over them? I say unto you, that he will avenge them speedily. Howbeit when

the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" In that assurance there is a clue to the mystery of those delays in the Divine response to our requests. Other purposes of God besides an answer to the cry of His elect await accomplishment; when those purposes are fulfilled, the accomplishment of their desire will be speedy and complete. And, as His operation in the Church or in the world is very slow to our eyes, we may by analogy argue that His meaning in long delay, as regards ourselves, is that He has in our own lives purposes to fulfil which, from the human point of view, are slowly developed. A test so searching draws ever from the Lord Himself the question whether, at His coming, He would find on the earth faith strong enough to bear it. Patience, toil, and co-operation with the slow processes of God are suggested by St. James's metaphor of "the husbandman," who "waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth," as he bade suffering Christians "stablish their hearts," and encouraged them to prayer. We see in his words the confidence of such Hebrew teachers as those who wrote the Thirty-seventh or the Seventy-third Psalm, and also the larger thoughts of "the wise men" of Israel, as they pondered the ways of God which, since the Incarnation, have been irradiated with Christian hope.

He prayed, but to his prayer no answer came,
And choked within him sank his ardour's flame;
No more he prayed, no more the knee he bent,
While round him darkened doubt and discontent;
Till in his room, one eve, there shone a light,
And he beheld an angel-presence bright,
Who said: "O faint heart, why hast thou resigned
Praying, and no more callest God to mind?"
"I prayed," he said, "but no one heard my prayer,
Long disappointment has induced despair."
"Fool!" said the angel, "every prayer of thine,
Of God's immense compassion was a sign;
Each cry of thine, 'O Lord!' itself contains
The answer, 'Here am I'; thy very pains,
Ardour, and love and longing, every tear
Are His attraction, prove Him very near."
The cloud dispersed; once more the suppliant prayed,
Nor ever failed to find the promised aid.[1]

[1] Jalaluddin Rumi, in *A Little Book of Eastern Wisdom*, 49.

2. The answer may be delayed as a means of spiritual discipline. We are here to be educated, and God knows best how to time His good gifts to that end. Humility, patience, and hope; how much we need such virtues as these and a faith that

> Knows Omnipotence has heard her prayer,
> And cries, It shall be done—sometime, somewhere;

and what heavenly graces are to-day adorning many a soul because of a period of suffering hard to bear and a good deal harder to understand, except for the sweet knowledge that God's best is being accomplished, and that some glad day "the whole of life's painful experience will be poured into song before the throne".

¶ If Jacob's desire had been given to him in time for him to get a good night's rest, he might never have become the prince of prayer we know to-day. If Hannah's prayer for a son had been answered at the time she set for herself, the nation might never have known the mighty man of God it found in Samuel. Hannah wanted only a son, but God wanted more. He wanted a prophet, a ruler, and a saviour for His people. Some one has said that in this instance "God had to get a woman before He could get a man". This woman He got in Hannah precisely by delaying the answer to her prayer, for out of the discipline of those weeks and months and years there came a woman with a vision like God's, with tempered soul and gentle spirit and seasoned will, prepared to be the kind of a mother for the kind of a man God knew the nation needed.[1]

3. The answer may be delayed by the very force of circumstances. You want to know if God cannot overcome these *instanter*? Yes, He doubtless can, but it is hardly the part of reverent trust to ask Him to do the miraculous if He can do this thing in His own good time in any other way. Impatience with God is the meanest sort of distrust. To pray for the instant healing of a diseased body is to ignore every secondary cause and every law of nature and to ask God to do the same, and to show that we fear not so much for His glory as for our own gratification. May not the same thing be true in some instances when prayer is sent up for the instant conversion of some soul? In fact, of the two is not the former much more reasonable? God

[1] W. E. Biederwolf, *How Can God Answer Prayer?* 232.

can handle the laws of nature as He will, but can He thus handle a human will and still leave the individual a free, moral, and responsible agent? A man's will must be influenced by motives; the evil of sin must be seen and something of the character of God appreciated. The power of these motives depends a good deal upon their proper presentation by the proper person and at the proper time. We do not need to explain why, but just to recognize what God has shown us to be true, that He has chosen to limit Himself very largely to human instrumentality in saving another man's soul. God will not coerce a man's will, but He may remove him from influences that have made it hard for him to be reached and bring him into new surroundings that may lead to the saving of his soul. In all these things the element of time must not be ignored.

¶ God in His dealings with souls will act with the wisdom which is His Divine characteristic, and seize such opportunities of influencing human hearts as He shall best be able to turn to good account. Hence it will not follow that our intercession has failed of its purpose because no special influence has been brought to bear on the person prayed for just at the moment that the prayer was offered. God may be abiding His time, not because He is in no hurry to bless or to save, but because He well knows that He can make His influence all the more felt by deferring its use for a season.[1]

¶ Here is a story which was told one Sunday in an Arran pulpit by one who knew the persons it concerned. There lived in a quiet village a godly man. And he had a wife and three sons. His wife died, and the burden of bringing up these sons fell on him. He cried to God to help him. Now, it so happened that in that house there was a rush-bottomed chair, the only chair of that sort in the house, and it was at that chair this good man knelt when he prayed for his boys as well as at family prayer. And often when alone he spent long whiles on his knees praying for their conversion. But he saw no change in his sons; they were hard, selfish, and worldly. At last one by one they all left him, and went into business in some great city of the land. They prospered in business, but not in religion. But business prosperity is not joy, and prosperity was making them hard. The father prayed the more earnestly that they might gain their own souls, although they should lose the whole world. But at the end of

[1] Canon Hay Aitken, *The Divine Ordinance of Prayer*, 169.

his days they were not saved. There was an old servant who lived in the house, and to her he said when he was dying, "I will pray now that my death may be used by God to save them". Then he died. The three young men came home to the funeral. And when all was past, they said: "What shall we do with the house and the old furniture?" One said: "Let them go to the old woman who has taken care of him". But the eldest son said: "Well, I consent if only you will allow me to get the rush-bottomed chair. I never heard prayers like those I heard there. I hear those prayers still when I am at business. I think if I had the chance I would not live the prayerless life I am living now." And the other two were softened. And with that the Spirit of the Lord came upon the eldest brother, and he said: "Let us kneel around it once more and pray". And they did. And with great crying and tears they spent that afternoon together. And the end of all was that the two younger brothers gave up their business and offered themselves to the mission-field. And they are well known as missionaries now. And the eldest brother is one of those whose praise is in all the churches.[1]

4. There are some prayers which are answered only by the promise of an answer. The centurion prays for his servant that he may be healed instantaneously; the immediate response is, "I *will* come". Have we never experienced this? We have asked something which has not at once been granted, and yet we have been made to feel that there was something more than silence. We have felt in our hearts what seemed the prophecy of an answer, a nameless, unspeakable strength which told us it would one day all be well. The summer did not come immediately, but the swallows came into our spring, and the interpretation of their song was this, "It will come".

¶ My soul, do not despise thy moments of anticipation. They have no present gifts to bring, but they bring the promise of great gifts to come; they have no immediate answer to thy prayer, but they tell thee of a time when thy prayer *will* be answered. Thinkest thou it is a light thing to have such moments? Great men have lived on them and died on them. Did not Abraham leave his country and his father's house with no other food in his heart than the strength of a promise? Was it not that promise that helped him to climb the Mount Moriahs of life, and to meet on their summits the great sacrifices to which

[1] Alexander Macleod, *The Child Jesus*, 98.

life is heir; he was made strong by the power of aspiration, by the voice which each morning said to him, "I will come". So shalt thou too be strong, O my soul. If thou shalt set out on thy journey with the prophecy of an answered prayer, thou too shalt climb Mount Moriah with unfaltering feet, thou too with unblanched cheek shalt meet the sacrifice on its summit. The glory of to-morrow shall prefigure itself through the tears of to-day, and the song of the approaching swallows shall be heard amid the snow; all shadows vanish from that heart to which God has said, "I will come".[1]

5. If the answer is delayed, we ought to ask ourselves if that which we desire is truly according to the will of God; and if we are satisfied that it is, we ought to continue "instant in prayer". Bengel gives his judgment that "a Christian should not leave off praying till his Heavenly Father give him leave, by permitting him to obtain something". And George Müller drew encouragement from the fact that he had been enabled to persevere in prayer daily, during twenty-nine years, for a certain spiritual blessing long withheld: "At home and abroad, in this country and in foreign lands, in health and in sickness, however much occupied, I have been enabled day by day, by God's help, to bring this matter before Him, and still I have not the full answer yet. Nevertheless, I look for it. I expect it confidently. The very fact that day after day, and year after year, for twenty-nine years, the Lord has enabled me to continue patiently, believingly, to wait on Him for the blessing, still further encourages me to wait on; and so fully am I assured that God hears me about this matter that I have often been enabled to praise Him beforehand for the full answer which I shall ultimately receive to my prayers on this subject."

¶ Moses desired to pass over Jordan with the tribes; but Jehovah said to him, "Speak no more unto me of this matter". Paul besought the Lord thrice that the thorn which rankled in his flesh might be withdrawn, but the only response vouchsafed was, "My grace is sufficient for thee". John, the beloved disciple, encourages us to pray for the salvation of our brethren, but even as we address ourselves to this holy duty he reminds us

[1] G. Matheson, *Moments on the Mount*, 147.

that "there is a sin unto death," in the face of which, apparently, prayer will not prevail.[1]

Unanswered yet, the prayer your lips have pleaded,
In agony of heart these many years?
Does faith begin to fail? Is hope departing,
And think you all in vain those falling tears?
Say not the Father hath not heard your prayer;
You shall have your desire sometime, somewhere.

Unanswered yet, though when you first presented
This one petition at the Father's Throne,
It seemed you could not wait the time of asking,
So urgent was your heart to have it known?
Though years have passed since then, do not despair;
The Lord will answer you sometime, somewhere.

Unanswered yet? Nay, do not say ungranted;
Perhaps your part is not yet wholly done;
The work began when first your prayer was uttered,
And God will finish what He has begun.
If you will keep the incense burning there,
His glory you will see sometime, somewhere.

Unanswered yet? Faith cannot be unanswered,
Her feet are firmly planted on the rock;
Amid the wildest storms she stands undaunted,
Nor quails before the loudest thunder shock.
She knows Omnipotence has heard her prayer,
And cries, It shall be done—sometime, somewhere.

III.

Different Answer.

1. A prayer is not unanswered because it is not answered as we wished. We can see now, as we look back on that strange scene in the Garden, how it was love for His own Son, as well as love for man, that led the Father to send the answer in His own way; and shall we not some day make similar discoveries about what seem to have been our unanswered prayers? When all the mysteries of life are at last unravelled, and we clearly see

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 151.

how truly goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life, shall we not discover that our prayers which seemed unanswered, though offered with all the faith and earnestness of which we are capable, have really been the most fully answered of any? And for these, peradventure, rather than for any others, we may find ourselves specially constrained to praise God.

¶ Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.[1]

¶ General Gordon, of Atlanta, Ga., told me of how the Confederate troops prayed for victory before the battle of Sharpsburg. The day before the battle they prayed earnestly that they might be victorious, so earnestly that both officers and men felt that their prayers would be answered. General Gordon said that many felt satisfied that the Confederate forces would sweep the Union lines, and would be on their way to Washington within a week. But the next day the battle came off, and in results it was one of the most crushing blows that the Confederates received during the war. General Gordon, who was shot five times, said that after the battle the men were discouraged. They felt that God was on the side of the largest legions. Some of the officers suggested that it would be better to spend less time in praying and more time in manufacturing powder and bullets. The suggestion seemed to be a good one even to the General. But he told me years after that the prayers of the Confederates on the day before that battle were best answered by defeat; that if the Confederates had captured Washington and defeated the Union our nation would now be far down the scale among the weaker nations of the earth.[2]

2. God often answers our prayers while we are still knocking, and in a better way than we asked for. We pray for physical good, and God answers with spiritual life. We pray to be freed from the burden, and God answers with patience and strength to endure. We pray to be spared the conflict, and God gives us courage to fight the good fight of faith. The great end of religious effort is a developed soul, a soul with a deep sense of God, a soul in which faith, courage, and resolution are at their highest. That these things be attained is the greatest of blessings; they

[1] William Morris. [2] R. H. Conwell, *How to Live the Christ Life*, 38.

are God's best gift to us. The soul that prays for patience, and has patience enough to continue praying when Heaven seems deaf or dead, has been answered, though it knows it not. The soul that prays for energy and resolution, and finds its resolve to get the blessing growing stronger with each new rebuff, has already been answered. While we deem ourselves forsaken and unheard, the answer is going on. Faith has grown stronger, resolve has taken deeper root, the hunger and thirst after righteousness has increased, manhood has been nourished, and if, at last, the direct and visible answer to our prayer should come, the direct blessing would not compare with the benedictions which have come from its delay.

¶ Dr. George M. Baker told once about a prayer which he made when he was a boy, asking God that he might go to a baseball game. His mother did not wish him to go in consequence of the character of the crowd that would be there. But he prayed three times that his mother might change her mind. He could not understand why she still stood to her original position. He went back to his work and began to think. He thought of how his mother loved him much more than any of the boys loved him, and how he loved her more than he loved them. So at last he began to feel that he did not care to go to the game; and he went and told his mother so, and told her that he had given up the idea. He would not go if she gave him permission, for he would prefer to stay at home and help her. His prayer was answered, although not in the way he expected—not by permitting him to go to the ball game, but by reconciling him to stay at home. Dr. Baker's lovely and potent life was largely shaped by that prayer.[1]

3. We may be inclined to say that to have a thing in another shape is equivalent to not having it at all. But if we knew God, we would leave that to Him. He is not mocked, and He will not mock. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He will deal with us not as the children of a day, but as children of eternal ages. We shall be satisfied, if we will but let Him have His way with the creature He has made. The question is between our will and the will of God. He is not one of those who give readiest what they prize least. He does not care to give anything but His best, or that which will prepare for it. Not

[1] R. H. Conwell, *How to Live the Christ Life*, 37.

many years may pass before we confess, "Thou art a God who hearest prayer, and givest a better answer". We may come to see that the deepest desire of our heart would have been frustrated by having what seemed its embodiment then.

¶ That God should as a loving Father listen, hear, consider, and deal with the request after the perfect tenderness of His heart is to me enough; it is little that I should go without what I pray for. If it be granted that any answer which did not come of love, and was not for the final satisfaction of him who prayed, would be unworthy of God; that it is the part of love and knowledge to watch over the wayward, ignorant child; then the trouble of seemingly unanswered prayers begins to abate, and a lovely hope and comfort takes its place in the child-like soul. To hear is not necessarily to grant—God forbid! but to hear is necessarily to attend to—sometimes as necessarily to refuse.[1]

4. In intercession for others the same law is observable. Many an anxious mother, as she prays for a difficult and wayward child, and finds that the boon is not yielded exactly in the way by which she had sought it, might remember that it was through a petition, in its exact form, refused in love, that the conversion of St. Augustine was accomplished. His mother's desire and earnest prayer was that her son might not sail for Italy, so greatly did she dread for him the temptations which would meet him there. With many tears she prayed that he might not sail. "But Thou," writes Augustine, "in the depth of Thy counsel and hearing the *hinge* of her desire (that on which all her prayer turned), regardedst not what she then asked, that Thou mightest make me what she ever asked." It was in Italy that her son found Christ. May we not, in another sphere, discern as plainly that prayer in the name of Christ received a most true answer although the immediate petition was refused?

¶ A father of a family lay on his death-bed. There was only one thought that caused him anxiety. He had a number of sons about whose religious condition he had long been greatly distressed. He could make no impression upon them by anything he could say. His hope and prayer was that by his death he might be allowed to do what he had not been able to do in his life. The prayer was answered, but most strangely. He had supposed that, if only his end might be bright and triumphant, they would be

[1] George MacDonald, *Unspoken Sermons*, ii. 70.

constrained to acknowledge that there was some reality and power in religion. What actually occurred was this. As his close drew near, he fell into the deepest gloom of depression. There seemed to be no gleam of comfort, no ray of light. And under the cloud he died. His sons watched it all, and when it was over, one of them said to the rest: "If our father, who was always a good man, died like that, how must we expect to die when our time comes?" It was the turning-point in their lives. The prayer had been answered, but not in the least in the way that had been expected.[1]

Oft when of God we ask
For fuller, happier life,
He sets us some new task
Involving care and strife:
Is this the boon for which we sought?
Has prayer new trouble on us brought?

This is indeed the boon,
Though strange to us it seems;
We pierce the rock, and soon
The blessing on us streams;
For when we are the most athirst,
Then the clear waters on us burst.

We toil as in a field,
Wherein, to us unknown,
A treasure lies concealed,
Which may be all our own:
And shall we of the toil complain
That speedily will bring such gain?

We dig the wells of life,
And God the waters gives;
We win our way by strife,
Then He within us lives;
And only war could make us meet
For peace so sacred and so sweet.[2]

[1] A. W. Robinson, *The Voice of Joy and Health*, 64.
[2] T. T. Lynch, *The Rivulet*.

XVII.

Answers to Prayer.

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Answers to Prayer.

On a thoughtful comparison of what we mostly find in books or sermons on prayer with the teaching of Christ, we shall find one great difference: the importance assigned to the answer to prayer is by no means the same. In the former we find a great deal on the blessing of prayer as a spiritual exercise even if there be no answer, and on the reasons why we should be content without it. God's fellowship ought to be more to us than the gift we ask; God's wisdom alone knows what is best; God may bestow something better than what He withholds. This teaching is of course quite true, yet it is remarkable that we find nothing of it with our Lord. The more carefully we gather together all He spoke on prayer, the clearer it becomes that He wished us to think of prayer simply as the means to an end, and that the answer was to be the proof that we and our prayer are acceptable to the Father in heaven. It is not that Christ would have us count the gifts of higher value than the fellowship and favour of the Father. By no means. But the Father means the answer to be the token of His favour and of the reality of our fellowship with Him.

¶ A life marked by daily answer to prayer is the proof of our spiritual maturity; that we have indeed attained to the true abiding in Christ; that our will is truly at one with God's will; that our faith has grown strong to see and take what God has prepared for us; that the name of Christ and His nature have taken full possession of us; and that we have been found fit to take a place among those whom God admits to His counsels, and according to whose prayer He rules the world. These are they in whom something of man's original dignity has been restored, in whom, as they abide in Christ, His power as the all-prevailing Intercessor can manifest itself, in whom the glory of His name is shown forth. Prayer is very blessed; the answer is more

blessed still, as the response from the Father that our prayer, our faith, our will are indeed as He would wish them to be.[1]

I.

Expect Answers.

1. The first thing, then, to notice in dealing with the difficult and much discussed matter of "answers to prayer" is that we are distinctly told by our Lord to expect that our prayers will be answered. At the very outset of His instruction to those who would learn to pray He seeks to lodge this truth deep into their hearts: prayer does avail much; ask, and ye shall receive; every one that asketh, receiveth. Christ has no mightier stimulus to persevering prayer in His school than this. As a child has to prove a sum to be correct, so the proof that we have prayed aright is the answer.

According to this teaching of the Master, prayer consists of two parts, has two sides, a human and a Divine. The human is the asking, the Divine is the giving. Or, to look at both from the human side, there is the asking and the receiving—the two halves that make up a whole. It is as if He would tell us that we are not to rest without an answer, because that is the will of God, the rule in the Father's family: every childlike believing petition is granted. If no answer comes, we are not to sit down in the sloth that calls itself resignation, and suppose that it is not God's will to give an answer. No; there must be something in the prayer that is not as God would have it; childlike and believing, we must seek for grace to pray so that the answer may come. It is far easier to the flesh to submit without the answer than to yield itself to be searched and purified by the Spirit until it has learnt to pray the prayer of faith.

There may be cases in which the answer is a refusal, because the request is not according to God's word, as when Moses asked to enter Canaan. But still, there was an answer: God did not leave His servant in uncertainty as to His will. The gods of the heathen are dumb and cannot speak. Our Father lets His child know when He cannot give him what he asks, and he withdraws his petition, even as the Son did in Gethsemane. Both Moses the

[1] Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 168.

servant and Christ the Son knew that what they asked was not according to what the Lord had spoken: their prayer was the humble supplication whether it was not possible for the decision to be changed. God will, by His Word and Spirit, teach those who are teachable and give Him time, whether their request be according to His will or not. Let us withdraw the request, if it be not according to God's mind, or persevere till the answer come. Prayer is appointed to obtain the answer. It is in prayer and its answer that the interchange of love between the Father and His child takes place.

The most remarkable thing about Christ's words on prayer is that there is not a syllable in them as to the philosophy of prayer, or difficulties about prayer, but simply a word of promise on which He causes us to hope; a threefold call to prayer, and a threefold promise that our prayer shall be heard. If we take Christ for what He gave Himself out to be, we must believe that He could have lifted out of the way the stumbling-blocks that seem to lie between us and the mercy-seat. He could have explained how prayer is related to the decrees of God, and to the laws of the universe. He does nothing of the kind. He simply asks us to take His word for it. And He had a right to take this way of it, because, according to the belief of the Church of Christ in every age, He came from God. We pray to God as children to a Father, because of Christ's word of promise on which He hath caused us to hope.

He answered all my prayer abundantly,
And crowned the work that to His feet I brought
With blessing more than I had asked or thought—
A blessing undisguised, and fair and free.

I stood amazed and whispered, "Can it be
That He hath granted all the boon I sought?
How wonderful that He for me hath wrought!
How wonderful that He hath answered me!"

Oh, faithless heart! He *said* that He would hear
And answer thy poor prayer, and He *hath* heard
And proved His promise. Wherefore didst thou fear?
Why marvel that thy Lord hath kept His word?
More wonderful if He should fail to bless
Expectant faith and prayer with good success!

¶ If anyone should question whether Christ meant His great prayer-command to be believed and acted upon, let him read the life of Pastor Gossner. He read the Lord's promise: "Ask, and it shall be given you," and then he went off and asked. More than that, he expected and prepared for replies. As a result, he sent into the foreign fields upwards of one hundred and forty missionaries. He provided outfits and passage-money. An average of over twenty missionaries were dependent upon him at all times. The net outcome of this man's life was summed up at his funeral in a sentence thus: "He prayed up the walls of a hospital, and the hearts of the nurses; he prayed mission stations into being, and missionaries into faith; he prayed open the hearts of the rich, and gold from the most distant lands".[1]

2. In agreement with this are the answers to prayer recorded in the Bible. They are to be measured in value not by the peace and tranquillity which flowed through the hearts of those who prayed, but by real answers seen in sensible results. The torrents which swept over the altars on Carmel, and threatened to stay the royal chariot's course, were no mere subjective conceptions in the prophet's or the monarch's mind. The widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite saw and clasped in their arms their sons given back from the grave in answer to prayer. The lengthening of Hezekiah's life and the victory of Jehoshaphat were real and intelligible blessings which followed prayer. Everywhere the primary idea that prayer is the asking for something which we hope to obtain is, to say the least, pointedly maintained in all Scripture representations; and though the notion of the spiritual elevation which is wrought in the soul by praying is neither denied nor forgotten, yet nowhere is it put forward as a substitute—

> To palter with us in a double sense:
> To keep the word of promise to our ear,
> And break it to our hope.[2]

¶ A good story is told of Bishop Pelham, of Norwich. A rather forward young man, who was by no means indisposed to thrust himself into distinguished society when a chance occurred, happened to see the Bishop enter a first-class compartment in a

[1] C. B. Keenleyside, *God's Fellow-Workers*, 151.
[2] W. Boyd Carpenter, *Thoughts in Prayer*, 54.

train by which he was himself intending to travel. On learning from the station-master that it was the Bishop of Norwich, he promptly took his seat opposite to him, and contrived to induce the good Bishop to lay aside the book he was reading and enter into conversation with him. It was not long before they found themselves discussing the wonderful developments of science in recent years, and the revolution they have wrought in the habits of modern society. "Yes," said the Bishop, "it's all very marvellous, and it is not easy to say which of all our modern inventions is the most amazing. I was present at a meeting of scientific men only the other day at which a discussion arose as to which of all our modern discoveries and inventions was in itself the most wonderful or likely to prove of most service to civilization. Much was said about the triumphs of steam by land and sea, but one prominent scientist, himself an enthusiastic electrician, stoutly maintained that nothing else could compare with the wonders of electricity. 'Just think of the marvel of it!' he exclaimed. 'Here you belt the world round with a wire, and you send your message off to the right, and in the twinkling of an eye you get it back on your left, it having travelled the wide world round in the meanwhile. Can you conceive anything more astonishing than that?'

"It was to an elderly clergyman, who happened to be of the company, that he thus appealed, and he replied: 'Yes, I can think of something even more amazing than that, and I was reading about it in a very old book only this morning'. 'What! in an *old* book? You surprise me; I should never have suspected an *old* book of being able to describe anything that could for a moment be compared to the wonder of electricity. Whatever was it?' 'Well,' said the clergyman, 'you shall judge for yourself. Here are the words in which this wonder, greater even than that of electricity, is described: "In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul". Now, here we have, first, a message sent all the way from earth to heaven, however far that may be, and the very same day the answer arrives. But more than that, here you have the practical effect that had been desired actually produced, a thing that electricity can never accomplish. You can send your message across the Atlantic, if you please, but there the matter ends; and if you want to get something practical done, you must trust to something else besides electricity to accomplish it. But here you have the message sent, the answer returned, and the practical result desired induced, and all in one day. That leaves even electricity a long way behind, doesn't it?'"

"And you, my lord," exclaimed the irrepressible tuft-hunter—"you were that elderly clergyman!" Whereupon, with a demure smile, the Bishop resumed the perusal of his book.[1]

II.

Answers do Come.

1. So the next thing is that answers to prayer do undoubtedly come. Answers of a most striking and impressive kind to intercessory prayer are of frequent occurrence, and constitute one of the most interesting features of mission work. This is especially the case where God seems to lay the burden of particular souls upon the hearts of some of His praying people. If we are living in full contact with and completely under the influence of the Holy Spirit, it is only reasonable to suppose that He will guide us in this important matter. He not only knows the things of God, but He must needs be able also to read the hearts of men, and to discover the spiritual condition of each. When, therefore, He sees that certain persons are in a receptive condition, inasmuch as He ever desires the co-operation of His people in His work of mercy, it would appear that He moves the hearts of those who know the power of prayer to pray for those particular persons. Having thus inspired the prayer, He can give an answer in accordance with His own desire, and also in accordance with the great law of prayer which He has ordained, and that without any inconsistency with those great principles of the moral government of the world which are the foundation of all God's dealings with man.

¶ I will dare to affirm that, so far from experiences of direct answers to prayer being rare and exceptional, it is, on the contrary, a rare thing to meet with a matured and experienced Christian who is unable to refer to certain incidents in his career in which, according to the best of his belief, definite answers were granted, and that, against apparent probability, to prayers for temporal benefits.[2]

¶ We make the experiment, or rather, the experiment has been made by vast numbers of people in different ages, and be-

[1] Canon Hay Aitken, *The Divine Ordinance of Prayer*, 31.
[2] *Ibid.*, 185.

lief in its value and efficacy has been substantiated by the fact that prayer has worked. Men have asked, and they have received. That is as certain as the multiplication table.[1]

2. It will be said that such conclusions are often very uncritical, and that, no doubt, many of these supposed answers can be explained in other ways; but, while it is freely admitted that this may be so in a large number of cases, it is equally clear that there remains a very considerable proportion of instances of which no such statement would be true, and in not a few of them our choice would have to lie between admitting that prayer had been answered and affirming that an extraordinary coincidence, or series of coincidences, had occurred. Surely common honesty demands that we should consider with an unbiased mind the comparative reasonableness of these alternative hypotheses.

¶ It must excite the attention of every thoughtful person, that the belief, God hears prayer, is found among all nations who have a knowledge of Deity, and is fundamentally peculiar to the whole human race. There must be a greater number of experiences of answers to prayer than is generally supposed, else the belief in the utility of prayer would not be so general, vivid, and prevalent.[2]

¶ As a matter of fact, whether it is because when we pray for others we are less blind to their real and highest needs than we are when we pray for ourselves, or whether it is because such prayers, being more disinterested, are more truly prayers "in His name," it is the experience of many with whom I have spoken on this subject that such prayers are answered too often and in too striking a way to make the hypothesis of coincidence at all a possible explanation.[3]

III.

Special Providences.

1. Here, however, we are introduced to the question of "special providences," one of the most perplexing questions in theology or in life. The convergent testimony in favour of the answer to prayer is so impressive that he would be a hardy man

[1] *George Henry Russell Garcia*, 202. [2] M. H. Reinhard.
B. H. Streeter, *Restatement and Reunion*, 27.

who should question it, were it not for the presence of what seems particularly strong negative evidence which, he may plead, abundantly justifies him in adopting an attitude of incredulity. The power of prayer and the reality of the answers that it is supposed to gain are questioned, not because there is so little to be said for, but rather because there is so much to be said against, them. We are familiar with the old story of the cynical visitor to the temple of Neptune, who, when the priest triumphantly exhibited, to the glory of his god, the votive tablets of those who had been saved from a watery grave by him in response to their vow, grimly inquired where were the tablets of those who had made their vow, and yet had been drowned none the less.

2. The argument against "special providences" is felt strongly in our day, for various reasons. It is expressed forcibly by Dr. Warschauer: While the scientific temper of the present day could not fail to affect our thoughts concerning prayer in some directions, the same has surely to be said about the ethical temper of the age, as shown in our enlarged conceptions of God. To put it bluntly, much of the language about what used to be called "special providences" has become unreal and ceased to be edifying for us. On this whole subject some words of Principal Adeney's can hardly be bettered:—

"Under the old theory God had His favourites, who were saved by their hairbreadth escapes in accidents that were fatal to persons who were not the objects of 'special providences'; this was supposed to account for the fact that one man in particular found that somebody else had taken the last berth in the ship he had meant to sail by, and so escaped the fate of the crew and passengers when it went down with all on board—no 'special providence' saving them. It looks like a reflection of the pagan mythological tales about heroes rescued by the timely interference of gods and goddesses in battles where thousands of common mortals perish unheeded. It is the aristocratic idea of privilege carried up to religion. The newer view is more democratic, and it seems to agree better with our Lord's assurance that not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father's notice, that the very hairs of our heads are all numbered."

All this has its direct bearing upon the subject of prayer.

We may still be occasionally regaled with stories of one solitary sailor being saved—Providence looking after him in response to his mother's petitions—while every other soul on board was drowned; but these narratives, once irresistible in the impression they created, are to-day received with somewhat mixed feelings. The view of God's character which they inculcate is apt to strike us as unsatisfactory; that He should avert a great and presumedly unmerited physical calamity from one individual simply and solely because He has been asked to do so by some other individual, while allowing the same calamity to overtake numerous others no more deserving of affliction, does not fit in with our conception of Him. We are slowly learning to substitute for the notion of any kind of preferential treatment at the hand of God a belief in the unchanging goodness of His decrees, in the wisdom of His counsel, and in the reality of His abiding and enfolding love; by Providence we mean something that is neither local nor personal, nor particular, but universal—the Providence of unchanging law, that living and loving will which "knoweth altogether".[1]

The most familiar, perhaps, of all cases of answers to prayer involving such special providences is that of George Müller. Prof. William James quotes Müller's experience as related in his autobiography, and then subjects it to the following criticism: "George Müller's is a case extreme in every respect, and in no respect more so than in the extraordinary narrowness of the man's intellectual horizon. His God was, as he often said, his business partner. He seems to have been for Müller little more than a sort of supernatural clergyman interested in the congregation of tradesmen and others in Bristol who were his saints, and in the orphanages and other enterprises, but unpossessed of any of those vaster and wider and more ideal attributes with which the human imagination elsewhere has invested him. Müller, in short, was absolutely unphilosophical. His intensely private and practical conception of his relations with the Deity continued the traditions of the most primitive human thought. When we compare a mind like his with such a mind as, for example, Emerson's or Phillips Brooks's, we see the range which the religious consciousness covers."[2]

[1] J. Warschauer, *Problems of Immanence*, 199.
[2] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 470.

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[1] J. Warschauer, *Problems of Immanence*, 199.

[2] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 470.

¶ In one of his letters the Quaker poet Whittier says: "I have been in the habit of reading a paper published by Dr. Cullis, of Boston. But I don't place much credit in the answers to prayer there stated. He gets his contributions just as many other institutions do. Here is a man who has $100 to give to benevolence, and he gives it, giving the Doctor $25, the missionary society $25, etc. Dr. Cullis publishes that his came in answer to prayer. So does the other just as much.[1]

¶ The entire question of miracle is involved with that of the special providences which are supposed, in some theories of religion, sometimes to confound the enemies, and always to protect the darlings of God: and in the minds of amiable persons, the natural and very justifiable sense of their own importance to the well-being of the world may often encourage the pleasant supposition that the Deity, however improvident for others, will be provident for them. I recollect a paper on this subject by Dr. Guthrie, published not long ago in some religious periodical, in which the writer mentioned, as a strikingly Providential circumstance, the catching of his foot on a ledge of rock which averted what might otherwise have been a fatal fall. Under the sense of the loss to the cause of religion and the society of Edinburgh, which might have been the consequence of the accident, it is natural that Dr. Guthrie should refer to it with strongly excited devotional feelings: yet, perhaps, with better reason, a junior member of the Alpine Club, less secure of the value of his life, would have been likely on the same occasion rather to be provoked by his own awkwardness, than impressed by the providential structure of the rock. At the root of every error on these subjects we may trace either an imperfect conception of the universality of Deity, or an exaggerated sense of individual importance: and yet it is no less certain that every train of thought likely to lead us in a right direction must be founded on the acknowledgment that the personality of a Deity who has commanded the doing of Justice and the showing of Mercy can be no otherwise manifested than in the signal support of causes which are just, and favour of persons who are kind. The beautiful tradition of the deaths of Cleobis and Bito, indeed, expresses the sense proper to the wisest men, that we are unable either to discern or decide for ourselves in what the favour of God consists: but the promises of the Christian religion imply that its true disciples will be enabled to ask with prudence what is to be infallibly granted.[2]

[1] S. T. Pickard, *Life and Letters of J. G. Whittier*, ii. 632.
[2] Ruskin, *On the Old Road* (*Works*, xxxiv. 119).

3. It must be frankly conceded that, with our present very limited knowledge, we are not in a position to give an adequate or a wholly satisfactory answer to this argument. All that we can hope to do is to prove that the argument does not really carry as much weight as at first it seems to do. We may show that in a very large number of cases the phenomena simply could not be otherwise than they are; that in a vast majority of such cases the explanation is plain and obvious, and that, while in some cases we may have to wait for an explanation till all the mysteries are cleared up, we may find in other cases sufficient light to suggest inferences of an explanatory character, where direct knowledge and information fail us. Alleged answers to prayer should in any case be carefully scrutinized before being allowed, and carefully interpreted when allowed. There is in popular thought considerable ignorance on this point, which often leads to religious scandal. There is in religious experience so much of what from the popular standpoint must be viewed as unanswered prayer, and that on the part of the best and holiest, that we cannot be too careful in our interpretation. It is well known what crude and irreverent interpretations of God's providential government are often given by the ignorant and unspiritually-minded; and the same thing occurs in the matter of prayer. Some coincidence that fits into the person's desire is fastened upon as an answer to prayer, and not infrequently spiritual pride and Pharisaism result.

¶ It has sometimes seemed to me that God does not intend the faith in prayer to rest upon an induction of instances. The answers, however explicit, are not of the kind to bear down an aggressive criticism. Your Christian lives a life which is an unbroken chain of prayers offered and prayers answered; from his inward view the demonstration is overwhelming. But do you ask for the evidences, and do you propose to begin to pray if the facts are convincing, and to refuse the practice if they are not? Then you may find the evidences evanescent as an evening cloud, and the facts all susceptible of a simple rationalistic explanation. "Prayer," says an old Jewish mystic, "is the moment when heaven and earth kiss each other." It is futile as well as indelicate to disturb that rapturous meeting; and nothing can be brought away from such an intrusion, nothing of any value except the resolve to make trial for oneself of the "mystic sweet communion".

I confess, therefore, that I read examples of answers to prayer without any great interest, and refer to those I have experienced myself with the utmost diffidence. Nay, I say frankly beforehand, "If you are concerned to disprove my statement, and to show that what I take for the hand of God is merely the cold operation of natural law, I shall only smile. My own conviction will be unchanged. I do not make that great distinction between the hand of God and natural law, and I have no wish to induce you to pray by an accumulation of facts—to commend to you the mighty secret by showing that it would be profitable to you, a kind of Aladdin's lamp for fulfilling wayward desires." Natural law, the hand of God! Yes! I unquestionably admit that the answers to prayer come generally along lines which we recognize as natural law, and would perhaps always be found along those lines if our knowledge of natural law were complete. Prayer is to me the quick and instant recognition that all law is God's will, and all nature is in God's hand, and that all our welfare lies in linking ourselves with His will and placing ourselves in His hand through all the operations of the world and life and time.[1]

IV.

Some Examples.

i. Petition.

1. Dr. A. T. Schofield states that he was yachting on the Zuyder Zee with a party of twelve, and it was highly important that they should reach Enkhuizen in time to catch the mail train. Starting as they thought with plenty of time, they were dismayed by the captain's report that there was not the slightest chance of catching the train, as the wind was contrary and a heavy storm had arisen. Dr. Schofield offered up a short and earnest prayer in his cabin, that if it were God's will they might still catch the train, as it was very important that they should get back to London at once. Hardly was the prayer finished when his nephew shouted out, "The captain says we shall be in Enkhuizen in half an hour". The doctor replied, "It cannot be. He told me he could not tell when we should be in, that it might be two or seven hours." In less than five minutes after the prayer was

[1] R. F. Horton.

offered, the wind changed right round and blew direct for the harbour, consequently they were in with a margin of time to spare. Dr. Schofield says that he has some hesitation in mentioning this case, because he anticipates the immediate rejoinder that it might happen by chance, or it was a mere coincidence.[1]

2. One definite answer to prayer was a great encouragement to the faith of Hudson Taylor. They had just come through the Dampier Strait but were not yet out of sight of the islands. Usually a breeze would spring up after sunset and last until about dawn. The utmost use was made of it, but during the day they lay still with flapping sails, often drifting back and losing a good deal of the advantage gained at night. The incident is related thus:—

"This happened notably on one occasion when we were in dangerous proximity to the north of New Guinea. Saturday night had brought us to a point some thirty miles off the land, and during the Sunday morning service which was held on deck I could not fail to see that the captain looked troubled and frequently went over to the side of the ship. When the service was ended I learnt from him the cause: a four-knot current was carrying us towards some sunken reefs, and we were already so near that it seemed improbable that we should get through the afternoon in safety. After dinner the long-boat was put out and all hands endeavoured, without success, to turn the ship's head from the shore.

After standing together on the deck for some time in silence, the captain said to me:—

'Well, we have done everything that can be done. We can only await the result.'

A thought occurred to me, and I replied:—

'No, there is one thing we have not done yet.'

'What is that?' he queried.

'Four of us on board are Christians. Let us each retire to his own cabin, and in agreed prayer ask the Lord to give us immediately a breeze. He can as easily send it now as at sunset.'

The captain complied with this proposal. I went and spoke to the other two men, and after prayer with the carpenter we all

[1] *Studies in the Highest Thought*, 48.

four retired to wait upon God. I had a good but very brief season in prayer, and then felt so satisfied that our request was granted that I could not continue asking, and very soon went up again on deck. The first officer, a godless man, was in charge. I went over and asked him to let down the clews or corners of the mainsail, which had been drawn up in order to lessen the useless flapping of the sail against the rigging.

'What would be the good of that?' he answered roughly.

I told him we had been asking a wind from God; that it was coming immediately; and we were so near the reef by this time that there was not a minute to lose.

With an oath and a look of contempt, he said he would rather see a wind than hear of it.

But while he was speaking I watched his eye, following it up to the royal, and there sure enough the corner of the topmost sail was beginning to tremble in the breeze.

'Don't you see the wind is coming? Look at the royal!' I exclaimed.

'No, it is only a cat's paw,' he rejoined (a mere puff of wind).

'Cat's paw or not,' I cried, 'pray let down the mainsail and give us the benefit.'

This he was not slow to do. In another minute the heavy tread of the men on deck brought up the captain from his cabin to see what was the matter. The breeze had indeed come! In a few minutes we were ploughing our way at six or seven knots an hour through the water . . . and though the wind was sometimes unsteady we did not altogether lose it until after passing the Pelew Islands.

Thus God encouraged me ere landing on China's shores to bring every variety of need to Him in prayer, and to expect that He would honour the name of the Lord Jesus and give the help each emergency required."[1]

3. Once when a sudden and terrible hailstorm was pouring down upon the fields, and likely to occasion serious damage, a person rushed into Bengel's room, and exclaimed: "Alas, sir, everything will be destroyed; we shall lose all!" Bengel went

[1] *Hudson Taylor in Early Years*, 196.

composedly to the window, opened it, lifted up his hands to heaven, and said, "Father, restrain it"; and the tempest actually abated from that moment.[1]

4. One day, about this time, I heard an unusual bleating amongst my few remaining goats, as if they were being killed or tortured. I rushed to the goat-house, and found myself instantly surrounded by a band of armed men. The snare had caught me, their weapons were raised, and I expected next instant to die. But God moved me to talk to them firmly and kindly; I warned them of their sin and its punishment; I showed them that only my love and pity led me to remain there seeking their good, and that if they killed me they killed their best friend. I further assured them that I was not afraid to die, for at death my Saviour would take me to be with Himself in heaven, and to be far happier than I had ever been on earth; and that my only desire to live was to make them all as happy, by teaching them to love and serve my Lord Jesus. I then lifted up my hands and eyes to the heavens, and prayed aloud for Jesus to bless all my dear Tannese, and either to protect me or to take me home to glory as He saw to be for the best. One after another they slipped away from me, and Jesus restrained them once again. Did ever mother run more quickly to protect her crying child in danger's hour than the Lord Jesus hastens to answer believing prayer, and send help to His servants in His own good time and way, so far as it shall be for His glory and their good? A woman may forget her child, yet will I not forget thee, saith the Lord. Oh, that all my readers knew and felt this, as in those days and ever since I have felt that His promise is a reality, and that He is with His servants to support and bless them even unto the end of the world![2]

5. A water famine was threatened in Hakodate, Japan. Miss Dickerson, of the Methodist Episcopal Girls' School, saw the water supply growing less daily, and in one of the fall months appealed to the Board in New York for help. There was no money on hand, and nothing was done. Miss Dickerson inquired the cost of putting down an artesian well, but found the expense

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 155.
[2] *John G. Paton: An Autobiography*, i. 266.

too great to be undertaken. On the evening of 31 December, when the water was almost exhausted, the teachers and the older pupils met to pray for water, though they had no idea how their prayer was to be answered. A couple of days later a letter was received in the New York office which ran something like this: "Philadelphia, January 1st. It is six o'clock in the morning of New Year's Day. All the other members of the family are asleep, but I was awakened with a strange impression that some one, somewhere, is in need of money which the Lord wants me to supply." Enclosed was a cheque for an amount which just covered the cost of the artesian well and the piping of the water into the school buildings.[1]

6. Some years ago in London a clergyman had succeeded, with the help of some friends, in opening a "home" in the suburbs to meet some special mission needs. It was necessary to support it by charity. For some time all went well. The home at last, however, became even more necessary and more filled with inmates, whilst subscriptions did not increase but rather slackened. The lady in charge wrote to the clergyman as to her needs, and especially drew his attention to the fact that £40 was required immediately to meet the pressing demands of a tradesman. The clergyman himself was excessively poor, and he knew not to whom to turn in the emergency. He at once went and spent an hour in prayer. He then left his house and walked slowly along the streets thinking with himself how he should act. Passing up Regent Street, a carriage drew up in front of Madame Elise's shop, just as he was passing. Out of the carriage stepped a handsomely dressed lady. "Mr. So-and-So, I think," she said when she saw him. "Yes, madam," he answered, raising his hat. She drew an envelope from her pocket and handed it to him, saying: "You have many calls upon your charity, you will know what to do with that". The envelope contained a Bank of England note for £50. The whole thing happened in a much shorter time than it can be related; he passed on up the street, she passed into the shop. Who she was he did not know, and never since has he learnt. The threatening creditor was paid. The home received further help and did its work well.[2]

[1] E. M. Bounds, *Purpose in Prayer*, 129.
[2] W. J. Knox Little, in *In Answer to Prayer*, 46.

7. An extraordinary case of sudden restoration to health from the very door of the grave was reported in the newspapers of 20 February, 1912, and some following days, especially in the *Evening News* of 20 February and the *Daily Chronicle* of 21 February. The whole story may now be read in a small book entitled *The Living Touch*, by Dorothy Kerin, which was published in the end of 1914. In this book Miss Kerin gives a sketch of her life leading up to the time when her health gave way, and then describes fully her illness and sudden and complete recovery.

The doctor who attended her is quoted as saying she had suffered enough to kill half a dozen people. In attending her he said he had found all the gravest symptoms of advanced tuberculosis, of diabetes, and other complications. She had been attended, under him, by twelve nurses up to the present, and a chart was kept of her temperature. This chart shows that her temperature rose and fell in the most alarming way—sometimes reaching as high as 105°.

The testimony is also quoted of Dr. R. Julyan George of Paignton, who says: "Having attended Miss Dorothy Kerin, I can testify to the serious nature of her illnesses, and to the fact that her recovery in each case was sudden and unusual. When I was first called in, on September 1, I found her in a semi-conscious state, and was told that she had been the victim of a violent assault. Examination showed fractured base of the skull and probably rupture of the drum of the left ear, with deafness on that side. Profuse hæmorrhage from nose and ear soon set in, and her condition was such as to cause considerable anxiety. On the evening of September 11, I received an urgent summons, and found the patient with a very high temperature and rapid pulse. Soon after my arrival, however, she went into what appeared to be a state of ecstasy, and when she came to herself she told us she had seen a vision. She said to me, 'Did you see Him? He came and put His hand on my head, and I am cool, cool all over me. He promised to come again.' I then took the temperature, and found it had dropped in a few minutes from 104° to 99°; the pulse had also fallen from 162 to 100. In spite of this experience she still remained in a very serious condition, with increasing weakness and constant hæmorrhage, but less

pain in the head. In addition, symptoms of acute appendicitis appeared, and my diagnosis being confirmed by Dr. C. Hyde Cosens, arrangements were made for Miss Kerin's removal to a Nursing Home, should an operation be necessary. On September 30, when I saw her early, she was quite deaf in both ears, and I was obliged to write on a piece of paper, 'It is an attack affecting your hearing. You must remember His promise. He *will* come again.' I was afraid of further developments and promised to return shortly. Returning two hours later, I found her fully dressed, and to all appearances perfectly well. Again she said she had seen a vision and had been healed."

There are other testimonies in the book—of nurses and of friends—as well as a minute account of the illness and recovery by Miss Kerin's mother.

This case is the more interesting that the prayer was silent, and rather the expression of faith than petition for recovery. After being restored to health Miss Kerin prayed very earnestly that God would show her what He had brought her back to do. She says, "I prayed much that God might guide me and point the way of ministration, and it has been shown me that the gifts of God can only be received through prayer. We shall find spiritual joy, or soul-health, through communion with God, and bodily health will follow as growth follows rain and sunshine."

ii. Intercession.

If it were not too delicate a subject, says Dr. Horton, I could recite instances, to me the most remarkable answers to prayer in my experience, of changed character and enlarged Christian life, resulting from definite intercession. It is an experiment which any loving and humble soul can easily make. Take your friends, or better still the members of the church to which you belong, and set yourself systematically to pray for them. Leave alone those futile and often misguided petitions for temporal blessings, or even for success in their work, and plead with your God in the terms of that prayer with which St. Paul bowed his knees for the Ephesians. Ask that this person, or these persons, known to you, may have the enlightenment and expansion of the Spirit, and quickened love and zeal, the vision of God, the profound sympathy with Christ which form the true Christian life. Pray and

watch, and as you watch, still pray. And you will see a miracle, marvellous as the springing of the flowers in April, or the far-off regular rise and setting of the planets, a miracle proceeding before your eyes, a plain answer to your prayer, and yet without any intervention of your voice or hand. You will see the mysterious power of God at work upon these souls for which you pray. And by the subtle movements of the Spirit it is as likely as not that they will come to tell you of the Divine blessings which have come to them in reply to your unknown prayers.

1. "I read recently the authentic case of a sailor coaxed into a mission service. He left early and unimpressed. As he went out, a lady bade him good-bye, and said, 'I shall pray for you'. He returned a rough answer. Some days later he astonished the comrade with whom he had attended the service by demanding, 'Is that woman still praying?' 'She is sure to be,' was the reply. He made an angry exclamation, but in a few days, despite himself, he was drawn back again and yet again to the service, finally to find salvation." [1]

2. "Some years ago, one of our great expresses was rushing through the night, and the engine-driver had to get off his secure place to do something to his engine, and missed his footing and fell. How he saved himself he never knew, but he caught hold of something on the engine and swung himself back again to a place of safety. When he reached home it was the early hours of the morning. He took off his boots and went quietly upstairs, not to awaken his sleeping children, and as he passed the room where his little daughter was sleeping the door was burst open, and out she rushed in her little nightdress, flung herself into his arms, put her arms round his neck and her cheek against his and said, 'Oh! daddy, daddy, I am glad to see you. I had such an ugly dream. I dreamt you were killed on the railway, and I got out of bed, and I knelt down, and I asked God to take care of you.' That strong man believes that God heard the prayer of that little child, and that to her he owes his life, and so do I." [2]

[1] E. S. Waterhouse, *The Psychology of the Christian Life*, 77.
[2] Bishop G. H. S. Walpole.

3. "A Cambridgeshire farmer told me that some time ago a lad of his, about seventeen years of age, ran away to London. The father went in quest of him, and visited all the boy's relatives in the metropolis, but could learn absolutely nothing of the wanderer. The farmer's task seemed hopeless, like hunting for a needle in a haystack. But he believed in prayer, and on the Sunday morning, as he stood in perplexity in the streets of the great city, he cried, 'Lord, lead me to my boy'. Soon afterwards he felt a strong desire to go to the City Temple, where Dr. Parker was preaching. On reaching the building he was taken up into the gallery, and one of the first persons he saw was his missing son. The lad confessed that he had intended leaving on the following Tuesday for Liverpool, from whence he meant to go to Australia. He returned home with his father, saw the folly of his conduct, and has since become a comfort and credit to his parents."[1]

4. A case was reported in a recent newspaper. I have no reason for either believing it or disbelieving it, beyond the fact that there are a thousand similar instances lying all round, and this one has been selected by me because it lies at hand, and will serve for an example of a whole region of spiritual phenomena.

The incident, which is reported in the *Morning Leader* of 29 November, 1904, is headed and reported as follows:—

"Preaching on Sunday, at Hanley Tabernacle, the Rev. Dr. J. G. James, M.A., of Yeovil, told an extraordinary story of telepathy.

"During the South African War a father prayed daily for his son, who was at the front. One night, moved by a strange impulse, the father felt bound to go on praying, and he continued in prayer until the morning.

"Some time afterwards a letter from the front revealed a remarkable fact. On the very night that the father was constrained to remain praying, his son was taken out of the hospital, where, unknown to his father, he had been down with enteric, and placed in the mortuary among the dead. The hospital doctor, however, was possessed by peculiar uneasiness, and could not rest; so he got up and went to the nurse who had ordered the removal of the body, and asked if she were sure the patient was dead.

[1] W. Haughton, *Twentieth Century Miracles*, 9.

"Although she said she was sure, the doctor went to the mortuary, and found that there was still breath in the body. The patient was taken back to the hospital, and eventually restored to health."

From an actual letter of the father, published in the *Western Chronicle*, Yeovil, 23 December, 1904, we are able to make some expansions of the story and some corrections. It should have been stated that the news of the young man's illness had been telegraphed home. Here are his father's own words:—

"At the commencement of his illness his young wife received a telegram from the War Office to say that her husband was dangerously ill. For all those weeks we could hear nothing more concerning him. You can imagine the anxiety and the intensity of our prayers. It must have been about the sixth week after the intelligence of his illness, while I was in bed trying to sleep, he stood before me erect, and waving his hand, said, 'Good-bye, Dad'. I was immediately impressed with the consciousness that he was in imminent peril, so rising and going downstairs, I spent the night in prayer. . . . About six o'clock in the morning, I felt that whatever might be the nature of the calamity it was averted." [1]

5. "On one occasion I was summoned from my study to see a girl who was dying of acute peritonitis. I hurried away to the chamber of death. The doctor said that he could do nothing more. The mother stood there weeping. The girl had passed beyond the point of recognition. But as I entered the room, a conviction seized me that the sentence of death had not gone out against her. I proposed that we should kneel down and pray. I asked definitely that she should be restored. I left the home, and learned afterwards that she began to amend almost at once, and entirely recovered; she is now quite strong and well, and doing her share of service for our Lord." [2]

6. "A young woman who had found the Saviour at one of the meetings when Mr. Matheson was with us, requested special prayer one night on behalf of her brother, a sailor, who had not been heard of for a long while. Prayer was offered for the con-

[1] J. Rendel Harris, *The Guiding Hand of God*, 53.
[2] R. F. Horton, in *In Answer to Prayer*, 78.

version of the wanderer. Some three months afterwards the young woman appeared at a meeting, and introduced her brother in a state of religious concern. Strange as it may appear, he had been awakened at sea on the very night on which prayer had been offered on his behalf. His own account of the matter was this: He was pacing the deck in the stillness of the night, when a thought about his soul took hold of him, and the more he strove to put it away from him the worse he grew. He had no peace till he returned home."[1]

V.

Spiritual Communications.

Before leaving the subject of special answers to prayer, it is fitting that some notice should be taken of a closely related, if not quite identical, subject—the experience which men and women have of guidance due to some inward suggestion, and usually regarded as a supernatural communication. The subject is presented by Dr. John Watson ("Ian Maclaren") in a paper contributed to a volume entitled *In Answer to Prayer*, edited by Bishop Boyd Carpenter.

Dr. Watson says: "During the course of my ministry, and especially of recent years, I have been moved to certain actions for which there seemed no reason, and which I only performed under the influence of a sudden impulse. As often as I yielded to this inward guidance, and before the issue was determined, my mind had a sense of relief and satisfaction, and in all distinct and important cases my course was in the end most fully justified. With the afterlook one is most thankful that on certain occasions he was not disobedient to the touch of the unseen, and only bitterly regrets that on other occasions he was callous and wilful or was overcome by shame and timidity."

He then gives three examples, of which the following is the most striking:—

"It was my privilege, before I came to Sefton Park Church, to serve as a colleague with a venerable minister to whom I was sincerely attached, and who showed me much kindness. We both felt the separation keenly and kept up a constant correspondence,

[1] J. Macpherson, *Duncan Matheson*, 133.

while this good and affectionate man followed my work with spiritual interest and constant prayer. When news came one day that he was dangerously ill it was natural that his friend should be gravely concerned, and, as the days of anxiety grew, that the matter should take firm hold of the mind. It was a great relief to learn, towards the end of a week, that the sickness had abated, and when, on Sunday morning, a letter came with strong and final assurance of recovery the strain was quite relaxed, and I did my duty at morning service with a light heart. During the afternoon my satisfaction began to fail, and I grew uneasy till, by evening service, the letter of the morning counted for nothing.

"After returning home my mind was torn with anxiety and I became most miserable, fearing that this good man was still in danger, and, it might be, near unto death. Gradually the conviction deepened and took hold of me that he was dying, and that I would never see him again, till at last it was laid on me that if I hoped to receive his blessing I must make haste, and by-and-by that I had better go at once. It did not seem as if I had now any choice, and I certainly had no longer any doubt; so, having written to break two engagements for Monday, I left at midnight for Glasgow.

"As I whirled through the darkness it certainly did occur to me that I had done an unusual thing, for here was a fairly busy man leaving his work and going a long night's journey to visit a sick friend of whose well-being he had been assured on good authority. By every evidence which could tell on another person he was acting foolishly, and yet he was obeying an almost irresistible impulse.

"The day broke as we climbed the ascent beyond Moffat, and I was now only concerned lest time should be lost on the way. On arrival I drove rapidly to the well-known house, and was in no way astonished that the servant, who opened the door, should be weeping bitterly, for the fact that word had come from that very house that all was going well did not now weigh one grain against my own inward knowledge.

"'He had a relapse yesterday afternoon, and he is . . . dying now.' No one in the room seemed surprised that I should have come although they had not sent for me, and I held my reverend

father's hand till he fell asleep in about twenty minutes. He was beyond speech when I came, but, as we believed, recognized me and was content. My night's journey was a pious act, for which I thanked God, and my absolute conviction is that I was guided to its performance by spiritual influence."

After relating his experiences, Dr. Watson offers three inferences.

(1) People may live in an atmosphere of sympathy which will be a communicating medium. When some one appears to read another's thoughts, as we have all seen done at public exhibitions, it was evidently by physical signs, and it served no good purpose. It was a mechanical gift, and was used for an amusement. This is knowledge of another kind, whose conditions are spiritual and whose ends are ethical. Between you and the person there must be some common feeling; it rises to a height in the hour of trouble; and its call is for help. The correspondence here is between heart and heart, and the medium through which the message passes is love.

(2) This love is but another name for Christ, who is the head of the body; and here one falls back on St. Paul's profound and illuminating illustration. It is Christ who unites the whole race, and especially all Christian folk, by His incarnation. Into Him are gathered all the fears, sorrows, pains, troubles of each member, so that He feels with all, and from Him flows the same feeling to other members of the body. He is the common spring of sensitiveness and sympathy, who connects each man with his neighbour and makes of thousands a living organic spiritual unity.

(3) In proportion as one abides in Christ he will be in touch with his brethren. If it seem to one marvellous and almost incredible that any person should be affected by another's sorrow whom he does not at the moment see, is it not marvellous, although quite credible, that we are so often indifferent to sorrow which we do see? Is it not the case that one of a delicate soul will detect secret trouble in the failure of a smile, in a sub-tone of voice, in a fleeting shadow on the face? "How did he know?" we duller people say. "By his fellowship with Christ" is the only answer. "Why did we not know?" On account of our hardness and selfishness. If one live self-centred—ever concerned

about his own affairs there is no callousness to which he may not yet descend; if one live the selfless life, there is no mysterious secret of sympathy which may not be his. Wherefore if any one desire to live in nervous touch with his fellows, so that their sorrows be his own and he be their quick helper, if he desire to share with Christ the world burden, let him open his heart to the Spirit of the Lord. In proportion as we live for ourselves are we separated from our families, our friends, our neighbours; in proportion as we enter into the life of the cross we are one with them all, being one with Christ, who is one with God.

¶ An American gentleman travelling in Europe was taken suddenly and seriously ill in one of our northern towns. The day before this happened, a clergyman, who was at a distance in the country, was seized with a sudden and unaccountable desire to visit this very town. He had no idea why, but prayed for guidance in the matter, and finally felt convinced that he must go. Having stayed the night there he was about to return home rather inclined to think himself a very foolish person, when a waiter in the hotel brought him an American lady's card and said that the lady wished to see him. He was the only English clergyman of whom she and her husband had any knowledge. They had happened to hear him preach in America. She had no idea where he lived, but when her husband was taken ill she and her daughter had prayed that he might be sent to them. On inquiry, strange to say, he was found to be in the hotel, and was able to render some assistance to the poor sufferer, who died in a few hours, and to his surviving and mourning relatives.[1]

¶ One of the most courageous and therefore helpful books on this subject is *The Guiding Hand of God*, by Dr. Rendel Harris. There he says: "A dear friend of ours, whose bright Christian experience is a continual exhilaration to all who know her, was one day going townwards on an errand of some kind, when she felt herself impelled in the spirit to turn down another road. She had not gone far when she came across a poor, degraded, drunken woman whom she had been in the habit of visiting and whom she had tried to help out of her many sorrows and sins. The wretched woman came up to her and confessed that she had been on the point of throwing herself into the canal, but that she had come up the road in question under the feeling that she would perhaps meet on the way the friend who had tried to

[1] Canon W. J. Knox Little.

influence and help her. It need hardly be said that the retrospect of that obedience to the voice of the Inward Monitor, which led our friend down the very road where she was wanted, has been not only a permanent stimulus to her own faith and love, but has also furnished an object-lesson to others who desire to realize increasing helpfulness to others by an increasing sense of the presence of the Lord with us, to direct us, and to make use of us. And it must be true that when we are trying to help others with ministries of love, we are not acting apart from God, and may expect to find ministrations of the Paraclete to ourselves." [1]

[1] J. Rendel Harris, *The Guiding Hand of God*, 100.

XVIII.

Prayer to the Trinity.

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PRAYER TO THE TRINITY.

1. THERE is no prayer at all without a conscience speaking to God. The act of saying words of prayer without this conscious speaking to God is simply the shell without the kernel. Who would not tremble to offer to God such a hollow mockery? But while that is no prayer at all which is not spoken to God, it is plainly of vast importance to our prayers to have true and clear notions of that God to whom we speak. The character of our prayers will be greatly affected by the way in which we think of God.

¶ In his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Professor W. James quotes the following amazing sentences from a private letter written by F. W. H. Myers, and quotes them with approval: "Prayer is the general name for that attitude of open and earnest expectancy. If we then ask to whom to pray, the answer (strangely enough) must be that *that* does not much matter. The prayer is not indeed a purely subjective thing; it means a real increase in intensity of absorption of spiritual power or grace; but we do not know enough of what takes place in the spiritual world to know how the prayer operates; who is cognizant of it, or through what channel the grace is given. Better let children pray to Christ, who is at any rate the highest individual spirit of whom we have any knowledge. But it would be rash to say that Christ Himself hears us; while to say that God hears us is merely to restate the first principle—that grace flows in from the infinite spiritual world."[1]

¶ See that you "direct" your prayer. You would not drop a letter into the post-box without directing it; yet people sometimes do something like this with prayer; they forget the Lord they are praying to. Aim at nothing, and you shall hit it; but aim at something, and you may hit it too.[2]

[1] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 467.
[2] J. Reid Howatt, *A Year's Addresses to the Young*, 4.

2. How are we to think of God? "As a Spirit," answers Bishop Walsham How: "'God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.' There must be no picturing of God to ourselves in any form or likeness. There must be no thinking of Him as in one particular place. It is true we look up to heaven, and often address our prayers to God as dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto. This is perfectly lawful and right, for there is a place where God displays His glorious majesty, and to which our hopes and aims, as well as our prayers, are pointed."[1]

But, says Dr. McComb, "the spiritual world seems so remote, intangible, unreal, as compared with our external environment, this solid and substantial frame of things. We go forth to meet Nature, and she responds to us through eye and ear and touch. We speak with our fellow-men, and at once communion of minds is established, and all the joys of human intercourse are ours. But when we try to speak to God and hear Him speak to us, it is as though we were in a vacuum, a soundless silence that paralyses utterance. What we miss is the concrete and personal. When we try to think of the Infinite Spirit our thoughts lose themselves, and we wander in the immense vague and feel the bewilderment of him who cried:—

> 'O that I knew where I might find him!
> Behold I go forward but he is not there;
> And backward but I cannot perceive him;
> On the left hand, where he doth work,
> But I cannot behold him;
> He hideth himself on the right hand
> That I cannot see him.'

We try to think of Him as infinitely wise and powerful. But goodness, wisdom, power, are themselves impersonal things, and in them the heart can find no rest. Now, it goes without saying that, without a sense of the reality of God, prayer is utterly worthless."[2]

3. Accordingly Dr. McComb pleads for the recognition of the Person of Christ in prayer: God will become more real and more

[1] W. W. How, *Plain Words*, iv. 11.
[2] S. McComb, *Christianity and the Modern Mind*, 203.

personal to us if when we pray we recall the figure of one whom we have known and loved, and brood on the beauty and grace of word and deed which the memory will never let die, and then say within ourselves: "This is God, only grander, more gracious, more beautiful by far". And from the imperfect embodiments of Divine grace we can turn betimes to the pages of the New Testament and look at the picture of the Son of Man as there portrayed. We cannot look at Him without feeling that in Him God comes to us, in Him God's love assumes visible embodiment, God's holiness ceases to be an ideal abstraction, takes to itself hands and feet and moves before us in a familiar and irresistible beauty. Putting ourselves face to face with Jesus Christ, the Infinite and the Absolute confront us, as it were, within the limits of space and time. The whole history of Jesus is but a parable of God's attitude towards us. Our prayers, therefore, will not lack definiteness or spiritual satisfaction if while we pray we imagine the figure of Christ in some characteristic moment of His career. As He places His hand on the sick and lifts disease from body and soul, we see, as in a mirror, the true character of God, as the Source from which all healing, health, and happiness come. When we see Him ascending Mount Olivet to weep the tears of pity over His beloved Jerusalem, what is this but a sign of something still more wonderful—the vision of God, who from His heavenly Olivet is vexed by the sins and touched by the sorrows of His children? When we follow Him to His last great sacrifice, wherein He lays down His life for the sinful, we see through the temporal drama into the eternal passion of God who, in some mysterious way, is afflicted in all our affliction, and bears vicariously the burden of human guilt, and loves every creature He has made with a love that works through death and disease and agony to final redemption. If, then, we let such thoughts as these fill the mind as we pray, the fire of devotion will not long remain unkindled, because God will no longer be silent unto us, but will become at once supremely real and supremely lovable.

But this seems to Bishop How dangerous and in any case unnecessary. We may realize God's presence, he says, without fixing our thoughts on Christ's human life. When we are about to pray, we should try to bring before our minds the sense of God's presence as well as of His listening ear. Perhaps this

sense of God's presence is sometimes injured and weakened by the language so constantly used as to prayers ascending up to His throne in the highest heavens. For instance, how often have we heard such a sentence as this: "The prayer that starts from a lowly heart stops not till it reaches the ear of God"? Is there not something misleading in this idea of a long journey which prayer has to make in passing from earth to heaven? Is it not more true to think of God as quite close to us when we pray—to try to realize and feel His presence as surrounding us, enclosing us? Is even this enough? Or must we not rather believe this Presence to be not only around us, but within us, so that God is closer to us than the very air we breathe, and that in speaking to Him we are holding communion with One who in His wonderful loving-kindness makes His very abode with us? If we sometimes think of God in His dwelling-place of heavenly glory, yet let us often try to feel the awful closeness of His presence, and speak to Him as we might to a friend at our side.

¶ The first thing that you are to do when you are upon your knees is to shut your eyes, and, with a short silence, let your soul place itself in the presence of God; that is, you are to use this or some other better method, to separate yourself from all common thoughts, and make your heart as sensible as you can of the Divine presence.[1]

4. The difficulty of realizing the presence of God in prayer is, however, a real one. And it is probably due most of all to our habit of thinking of God as distinct from Christ, as omnipotent, omniscient, and afar off, Christ being near and very loving. But God is our Father. This is the first thought with which to approach Him in prayer. And the second thought is that His Fatherhood is not only revealed to us by Christ but made ours in Christ. The manifestation of God which the Bible records is the revelation not of arbitrary omnipotence but of loving personality. The Being whom to know is life eternal is not a God extraneous to the order of the universe, whose leading attribute is the power of doing anything He pleases, but the soul, the life, the pulse of this mysterious universe.

[1] William Law, *A Serious Call.*

¶ There is a story told of an old North Carolina preacher and backwoodsman that has interested me many a time. For years as a young man he trembled on account of his sins. He was afraid of God. He would go to church and hear the man of God and it would send a chill all over his body. Ofttimes he could not stay in the place. He had to get up and go out. He was so afraid of God. He felt that God was hunting for him everywhere he went, and he was running from God all the time. Years passed by. When he would attempt to pray he would see an angry God. But finally, out by the side of a log in the woods one night, where he had gone after making up his mind to get peace, he came in touch with Jesus; just the process I do not remember, but he came in touch with Jesus, and for a moment he forgot God and began to talk with Jesus. He told Jesus his troubles and implored Him to help him. Instantly Jesus passed from his mind and he began to think of God; not a God that was out of patience—He was a God loving, a God yearning, a God seeking that He might save and bless; and He was not afraid of Him; he was right with Him, closer than ever before, and he was perfectly at ease in His presence.[1]

¶ I have no wish to transfer Ben Nevis to the Atlantic Ocean. It is only a dull imagination that can interpret our Saviour's words about the faith that removes mountains in a sense so destitute alike of true poetry and of genuine power. I am no mathematician, but I doubt whether even a Senior Wrangler has much enthusiasm for infinity. It may be true that the undisciplined or indolent mind finds comfort in the thought of a benevolent Omnipotence which, to use Matthew Arnold's celebrated phrase, can turn a pen into a pen-wiper. But of this we may be certain, that for serious thought such speculations have no significance. The cry of suffering humanity is expressed in the wistful challenge of St. Philip, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us". And the response of eternal Love is the assurance of a Personal Being whose presence overshadows the homeless lives of men. "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid." "O heart I made, a heart beats here."[2]

I.

Prayer to God.

1. This, then, is the first thing, that prayer may rightly be addressed to each person of the Divine Trinity separately. No

[1] L. G. Broughton, *The Prayers of Jesus*, 53.
[2] J. G. Simpson, *The Spirit and the Bride*, 168.

doubt most prayer should be addressed to God the Father, as the Fountain and Source of all things. And perhaps there is some need of a caution in these days lest this be lost sight of. There has been on the part of some a great leaning towards addressing prayer mainly to God the Son. Of the lawfulness and fitness of such prayer we may not doubt. It is God's will "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father". And if we believe, with the Church universal, that Jesus Christ is "equal to the Father as touching His Godhead," plainly worship is His right. We dare worship none but God. But we worship Jesus, because we believe Him to be God. Yet it is no less true that to address our prayers mainly to Him may be a dishonouring of the Father, even as it is contrary to the spirit of the Bible and the usage of the Church.

¶ That worship was directed to each of the three Persons of the Godhead in the ante-Nicene Church, and that the tribute of Divine honours to the Son and the Holy Ghost as God was not the addition or invention of later ages, has been conclusively proved by Bingham in the *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, bk. xiii. ch. ii., and by Dr. Liddon in the Bampton Lectures on *The Divinity of our Lord*, pp. 387-422 (11th edition). S. Ignatius bids the Roman Christians put up supplications to the Lord that "he . . . may be found a sacrifice to God"; in S. Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians*, the Father and the Son are united in benediction and intercession; in the Apologies of S. Justin Martyr and Tertullian, the adoration of Christ is asserted and justified; Origen, with occasional inconsistency of language, insists upon the worship of Jesus Christ, illustrates it by his own personal example, and bases it upon the truth of His Godhead. And in the early Christian hymns, such as the *Tersanctus*, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the *Gloria Patri*, and the "Hail! gladdening light," the worship offered to the Father and the Son is offered also to the Holy Ghost.[1]

¶ Speaking of the famous Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen, Prof. Bain says: "The first occasion when I resumed attending the church, I was taken all of a heap with listening to his first prayer: the easy flow of language, the choiceness of his topics, and the brevity of the whole, came upon me like a new revelation." Dr. Bain also tells us that it was a common habit with the Doctor, in his prayer, to "address the three persons in the Godhead in con-

[1] A. J. Worlledge, *Prayer*, 95.

secutive order, adapting the petitions to the specific personality of each," and, he adds, "I never heard this done by any other preacher ".[1]

2. But it should be clearly understood that in addressing the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit, we address the One Eternal God under the eternal distinctions of His Triune Essence. To the Church of Israel, the revelation on which worship rested was summed up in the sentence, "The Lord our God is one Lord ". To the Church Catholic, the name of the one Lord our God is revealed as He is in His Triune Essence: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That revelation could be made by the God-Man alone. In His eternal Person, He united the uncreated and created natures, and thus unveiled to man the inner eternal distinctions in the Divine nature, which are revealed also as strictly compatible with the Divine Unity. The struggle with Arianism and the Creed of Nicæa really meant the reassertion of the unity of God, and "for the modern world, the Christian doctrine of God remains as the only safeguard in reason for a permanent theistic belief."

¶ Christian prayer is prayer to God through Christ. It is prayer to our Father in heaven; yet our prayer does not go to the Father in such sense as if the Son and the Holy Spirit were excluded, as if it dared not apply to them. To the Son also we may and ought to pray, as we ought also to call upon the Holy Spirit; and the Church has ever, yea from its beginning, done both. But though one or the other of the persons is preponderantly present to the consciousness or the imagination, it still remains the three-one God to whom prayer is addressed.[2]

¶ All invocation of Jesus is in the last resort adoration of God, who is revealed to us in Him. Any additional honour, as it might appear to be, would, according to His own clear declaration, be an impairment. Not always has the Christian Church, nor have its individual members, maintained the chaste reserve of the Church of the first age and its members; not always have they maintained the same confidence. Prayer to the Saviour has supplanted prayer to the Father, and on the other hand it has been suspected of being unchristian. Heartfelt confessions in

[1] J. Stark, *Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen*, 103.
[2] H. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, i. 173.

truthful biographies, together with the prayers and hymns appointed for congregational devotion, show plainly what important rights the individual and likewise the separate circle have in this sacred concern of faith, but also how unchangeable are those limits which are essential to the religion. To genuine prayer, the mere supposition that the object of its trust is not a unity is intolerable; but for it, Jesus is with equal certainty united to the Father in such wise that, while there is an invocation of the Father, there is also an invocation of Jesus, with a meaning of its own which falls under no suspicion.[1]

¶ Some time since I was two Sundays in an important parish of the north. Thirteen hymns were sung. In all these there was but one stanza of one hymn which was addressed to the Eternal Father. To Him was addressed one seventy-eighth part of the Spiritual Songs of His people. That one stanza invoked Him as the Giver of dew and of dewy sleep. Everything else, except certain eulogies on the Church, was addressed to our Lord, and almost entirely to His Human Nature. Now when we consider that our Lord's mission was, as He described it, to gather "true worshippers to the Father," we must, whatever allowances or explanations we make, admit that the Divine offices of those two Sundays lacked proportionateness.[2]

II.

Prayer to God the Son.

1. Prayer to the Son and the Holy Ghost is a necessary and legitimate development from the Scriptural doctrine of their unity in the Divine essence with the Father. To Jesus Christ Stephen prayed at his dying hour in commendation of his parting soul, and in appeal to Him not to impute their sin to his murderers in condemnation. Before Jesus Christ, Ananias pleads the secret thoughts of his heart, and, in addressing Him as Lord, uses the significant phrase, "All who call upon thy name," an expression, common in the Old Testament, derived from the way in which prayers addressed to God begin with the invocation of the Divine name. To invoke Jesus Christ in prayer as Lord is to Paul the Apostle the practice of the Christian, as to Saul the persecutor it had been the mark by which he had recognized his

[1] T. Haering, *The Christian Faith*, ii. 665.
[2] Archbishop Benson, *The Seven Gifts*, 168.

victims. Not only in the threefold entreaty that the "thorn in the flesh" might be removed did St. Paul address Jesus Christ, but constantly in prayer for himself, in intercession for his converts, in thanksgiving, and in benediction, where he co-ordinates the Father and Christ. And his prayer was no expression of passing emotion. It was, on the contrary, the result of a very definite conviction. St. John is speaking of the Son of God when he writes, "And this is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he heareth us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of him".

Certain it is that no sooner had Christ been lifted up from the earth, in death and in glory, than He forthwith began to draw all men unto Him. This attraction expressed itself, not merely in an assent to His teaching, but in the worship of His Person. No sooner had He ascended to His throne than there burst upwards from the heart of His Church a tide of adoration which has only become wider and deeper with the lapse of time. In the first days of the Church, Christians were known as "those who called upon the name of Jesus Christ". Prayer to Jesus Christ, so far from being a devotional eccentricity, was the universal practice of Christians; it was the act of devotion which specially characterized a Christian. It would seem more than probable that the prayer offered by the assembled Apostles at the election of St. Matthias, was addressed to Jesus glorified. Stephen's last cry was a prayer to our Lord, moulded upon two of the seven sayings which our Lord Himself had uttered on the cross. Jesus had prayed the Father to forgive His executioners. Jesus had commended His Spirit into the Father's hands. The words which are addressed by Jesus to the Father are by St. Stephen addressed to Jesus. To Jesus Stephen turns in that moment of supreme agony; to Jesus he prays for pardon for his murderers; to Jesus, as to the King of the world of spirits, he commends his parting soul.

St. Paul tells us, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me". Now in the invariable usage of Paul's Epistles, "the Lord" is not, as it popularly is with us, a mere synonym for God, but is the special title of Jesus Christ. With St. Paul, as he tells us, there were not gods many and lords many,

but one God the Father, of whom were all things, and we in Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by Him. The context is sufficient to show that the present passage is no exception to Paul's ordinary usage, and that it is one of the proofs that the Apostles practically showed their belief in the Godhead of their risen Master by addressing to Him their prayers. The Lord had answered his prayer, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness". And the Apostle adds, with reference to this answer, "Most gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me," showing most distinctly that Christ was the Lord whose strength was made perfect in his weakness. "I rejoice in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

¶ When you direct any of your petitions to our Blessed Lord, let it be in some expressions of this kind: "O Saviour of the World, God of God, Light of Light; Thou that art the Brightness of Thy Father's Glory and the express Image of His Person; Thou that art the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End of all things; Thou that hast destroyed the power of the devil, that hast overcome death; Thou that art entered into the Holy of Holies, that sittest at the right hand of the Father, that art high above all thrones and principalities, that makest intercession for all the world; Thou that art the Judge of the quick and dead; Thou that wilt speedily come down in Thy Father's Glory to reward all men according to their works, be Thou my light and my peace," etc. For such representations, which describe so many characters of our Saviour's nature and power, are not only proper acts of adoration, but will, if they are repeated with any attention, fill our hearts with the highest fervours of true devotion.

Again, if you ask any particular grace of our Blessed Lord, let it be in some manner like this: "O Holy Jesus, Son of the Most High God, Thou that wast scourged at a pillar, stretched and nailed upon a cross for the sins of the world, unite me to Thy cross, and fill my soul with Thy holy, humble, and suffering Spirit. O Fountain of Mercy, Thou that didst save the thief upon the cross, save me from the guilt of a sinful life; Thou that didst cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, cast out of my heart all evil thoughts and wicked tempers. O Giver of Life, Thou that didst raise Lazarus from the dead, raise up my soul from the death and darkness of sin. Thou that didst give to

Thy Apostles power over unclean spirits, give me power over my own heart. Thou that didst appear unto Thy disciples when the doors were shut, do Thou appear unto me in the secret apartment of my heart. Thou that didst cleanse the lepers, heal the sick, and give sight to the blind, cleanse my heart, heal the disorders of my soul, and fill me with heavenly light." Now these kinds of appeals have a double advantage: first, as they are so many proper acts of our faith, whereby we not only show our belief of the miracles of Christ, but turn them at the same time into so many instances of worship and adoration; secondly, as they strengthen and increase the faith of our prayers, by presenting to our minds so many instances of that power and goodness which we call upon for our own assistance. For he that appeals to Christ, as casting out devils and raising the dead, has then a powerful motive in his mind to pray earnestly and depend faithfully upon His assistance.[1]

2. It is true that we look to the Father, but only "through Jesus Christ"; and that "through" is no mere empty formula, but implies an actual communion of thought and fellowship of mind. It is true that we yearn to know the Father, but He is known only in Christ. If we are to make any distinction at all between prayer to the Father and prayer to the Son, we may follow the Litany, the larger part of which is addressed directly to the Son, but the whole of which is commended, both at the beginning and at the end, to the Father. Or we may go still further back, and take the *Te Deum* for our example. Here, as a recent writer advocates with much probability, the whole of this Psalm of Praise, except three verses, is addressed to the Son, though the worship of the Father and the Spirit finds its place in the middle of the hymn. We cannot be wrong, then, in holding very full communion with our Lord in prayer and praise, whilst we shall naturally, when such spiritual communion has lifted us up to the Father, conclude our devotions with the Lord's Prayer and such other prayers as are immediately addressed to Him.

¶ It is remarkable that, in spite of Jesus' injunction to pray to the Father, the address to God the Father—with the exception of the simple exclamation, "Abba, Father," which occurs twice—is found only four times in the prayers of St. Paul. Everywhere

[1] William Law, *A Serious Call.*

else Christ is in some way implicated in Paul's address to God, for whom the usual designation is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". This is certainly no accident. It is an eloquent testimony to the difference that Jesus made in Paul's relations to God. What God now is to Paul, He is through Jesus.[1]

¶ In a recent number of the *Christliche Welt*, Dr. Rade, its editor, a pronounced Ritschlian, declared he would pray to Jesus Christ; his soul needed such a devotional relation to Him; and whatever historical and anti-metaphysical considerations made Christ only a man, his faith and love and longing for peace embraced Jesus as Lord and God.[2]

III.

Prayer to God the Holy Spirit.

No instance of prayer directly addressed to the Holy Spirit can be found in the New Testament. This may be due to the fact that the Holy Spirit is regarded as having already been given to the believer as the indwelling presence of God, and that therefore prayer to One who dwells within may not have been considered suitable.

But prayer is really addressed to the Holy Spirit when it is addressed to God, because, in the Unity of the Divine Essence, He is one with the Father and the Son. He is invoked in benediction: "The communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all". He is addressed in intercession: "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ".

There is yet a wider phase of the subject. The Bible throughout, from Genesis i. 2, consistently presents the Holy Spirit as the universal vitalizing Executive of Deity, the active agent in producing, nourishing, and developing all life, beauty, organic force, and order in the universe, the direct source of the fragrance of the rose, the flavour of fruit, the strength of the athlete (Judges xiv. 19), the vision of prophet and poet, the equipment of Christ, the life of enduring literature (2 Peter i. 19-21). His function in developing piety is central but not exclusive. Why may we not, how shall we not, find Him everywhere, converse with Him on all His glorious work, and seek from Him supplies through every

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 162.
[2] *Expository Times*, xviii. 432.

department of His productive power? He is in the world as well as in the Word, and we find Him and commune with Him, open-eyed, in garden and grove as well as in the solitude of the closet and in prayer for revivals and missions.

We gain greatly in the keenness of our consciousness of the reality of the members of the Godhead by talking freely, naturally, lovingly with them, in prayer. Those who pray to the Spirit are not likely to slip into the vague use of the pronoun "it" when referring to Him, as though He were only an abstract force. He is our Comforter, our Guide, our Teacher, and our Friend. It is He who makes Christ known to us. And He uses us, if we will let it be so, to make Christ known through us to others. Shall we not talk freely with Him of this blessed, glorious mystery yet fact, Christ the life of the world, which it is the mission and the passion of the Holy Spirit to bring fully to pass? God is one God, though in three persons, and we shall come to know God better and better as we come to know the different persons of the Trinity in the sacred and intimate fellowship of the priceless privilege of prayer, addressing them individually according to the need of the moment, and in the light of the plain teachings of God's Word.

¶ If it is the Holy Spirit's special function not only to speak to and deal with, but also to speak and work through, the man He renews and sanctifies, we can just so far understand that He the less presents Himself for our articulate adoration. But meanwhile the sacred rightfulness of our worship of the Holy Spirit is as surely established as anything can be that rests on large and immediate inferences from the Scriptures. If He is divine, and if He is personal, how can we help the attitude of adoration when, leaving for the moment the thought of His work in us, we isolate in our view the thought of Him the Worker? Scripture practically prescribes to us such an attitude when it gives us our Lord's own account, in His baptismal formula, of the Eternal Name as His disciples were to know it—"The name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"; and when in the Acts and the Epistles the Holy Ghost is set before us as not only doing His work in the inmost being of the individual but presiding in sacred majesty over the community; and when in the Revelation He, in the mystical sevenfoldness of His operation, Seven yet One, appears in that solemn prelude as the concurrent Giver, with the Father and the Son, of grace and peace; above

all when in the Paschal Discourse the adorable and adored Lord Jesus presents Him to our faith as co-ordinate with Himself in glory and grace, "another Comforter".

So, while watchfully and reverently seeking to remember the laws of Scripture proportion, and that according to it the believer's relation to the Spirit is *not so much* that of direct adoration as of a reliance which wholly implies it, let us trustfully and thankfully worship Him, and ask blessing of Him, as our spirits shall be moved to such action under His grace. Let us ever and again recollect, with deliberate contemplation and faith, what by His word we know of Him, and of His presence in us and His work for us, and then let us not only "pray *in* the Holy Ghost" but also *to* Him.[1]

¶ This is the prayer to the Holy Ghost in the liturgy of the Armenians: "By Thee and through Thee, did the offspring of the patriarchal family of old, called seers, declare aloud and plainly things past and things to come, things wrought and things not yet come to effect. Thou, O energy illimitable, whom Moses proclaimed Spirit of God moving on the face of the waters, by Thine immense brooding and by Thy tender sheltering of the new generations under the overspreading of Thy wings madest known the mystery of the font; who after the same pattern spreading first the liquid element as a veil on high didst in lordly wise form out of nothing, O mighty, the complete natures of all things that are. By Thee all creatures made by Thee shall be renewed at the resurrection, the which day is the last of this existence and the first of the land of the living."[2]

¶ With the exception of the third invocation of the Litany, there is nothing within the covers of the Prayer-Book, I think, immediately addressed to the Holy Spirit save the hymn *Veni Creator*. This may be our sanction for sometimes employing this soul-invigorating form of prayer, only we must be careful in this case, as in the case of prayers to our Lord, to safeguard the unity of Almighty God. Certainly others besides ordinands need the inspiration of this prayer. It forms, for instance, a most helpful introduction to the act of early morning private devotion, or as a preparatory exercise before the reception of Holy Communion. The original of this hymn in Latin, simple, vigorous, and concise, is of great antiquity, though it is perhaps impossible to trace its authorship. Our English version was made by Bishop John Cosin of Durham in 1660, and found its

[1] H. C. G. Moule, *Veni Creator*, 18.

[2] Alexander V. G. Allen, *Christian Institutions*, 543.

way into the Prayer-Book of 1661 (the longer version appeared first in 1549, and was modernized in 1661). No other Latin hymn—the *Te Deum* alone excepted—has taken deeper hold of the Western mind, and its influence has prompted many other hymns to the Holy Spirit. Most of these unfortunately lack the safeguard alluded to above. Of these the most beautiful—probably because it represents in a translation what Archbishop Trench termed "the loveliest of all the hymns in the whole circle of sacred Latin poetry"—begins, "Come, Thou Holy Spirit, Come".[1]

¶ St. Paul speaking of Christ the Lord says, "Through him we all have access by one Spirit to the Father". In this little verse we have mention of all the three Persons. There is the Father, *to* whom we have access, or approach in prayer; there is the Son, *through* whom we have this access; and lastly, there is the Spirit, *in* whom this access, this open way to God and to the throne of grace, is ours.

(1) And, first, it is access *to* the Father; He is the ultimate object of our prayers. I do not say that we do not most fitly pray to Christ. He too is God. Our Church, in more than one of her Collects, expressly addresses herself to Him, makes her supplication to Him. Still these are the exceptions, and not the rule. They are more often brief ejaculations of the soul that go forth to Him, as those in the Litany: "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us Thy peace"; or as this, "O Son of David, have mercy upon us". It is these, rather than more set deliberate prayers, which are addressed to the second Person of the Trinity. We have *access to the Father*, and our prayers must not stop short till they mount up to Him. The prayer of all prayers, that with which the Son of God taught us to pray, begins with "Our Father". O words of comfort and strength unutterable for the children of men! Conceive to yourselves what it would be, how it would fare with us, if God only presented Himself to us as a God of nature, a God of power, a Maker of heaven and earth, with a certain vague general benevolence and good-will toward us, in common with the other creatures of His hand. Think what this would be in our trials, our temptations, our remorse of conscience, our agonies, this God of *nature*, as compared with what is, a God of *men*, a Father in heaven, who opens wide a Father's arms to His wandering and suffering children here, and will embrace with a Father's love, and draw

[1] C. H. Druitt, *The Obligation of Prayer*, 25.

them close to a Father's heart. Here is the magic of that word of the Gospel which we declare, here is its secret, attractive power —that it wakens up in the hearts of the poor prodigals of earth such thoughts as these, "I will arise, and *go to my Father*".

(2) But if prayer is thus *to* the Father, it is, as St. Paul declares, *through* the Son. He is the Daysman that must lay His hand upon us both,—upon God and man, upon God in heaven, and man upon earth, upon God holy and man unholy—and must bring them together, face to face, so that man may see God's face, and not perish in the seeing; may enter into God's presence, and not be consumed by the intolerable brightness of that presence; may speak with his unclean lips to God, and yet, unclean as those lips are, may speak not in vain, but words which shall prevail. When we affirm, or rather when Scripture affirms, that all approaches to God the Father, all approaches in prayer or otherwise, are through God the Son, that no man can come to the Father but by Him, while by Him all may come near, it affirms herein the absolute holiness of God, the deep sinfulness and defilement of man, which renders him quite incapable by himself of holding communion, of entering into fellowship with God; which has put a broad gulf between these two; but it asserts likewise that this gulf, which no other could bridge over, has yet been bridged over by Christ; that He by His life, being at once God and man, the two natures in one person united, by His death, making a sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, has brought near those who were before far asunder; that there is now freedom of access, an open way to the Father, through the Son.

(3) But, thirdly and lastly, it is *in* the Spirit that this access is ours. What may this mean? Prayer, my brethren, is a work of grace, and not of nature. We pray because God, God the Holy Ghost, puts it into our hearts to pray, helps our infirmities, suggests to us what things we ought to pray for, and how. Look at a ship without a wind, becalmed in the middle sea, its sails flapping idly hither and thither; what a difference from the same ship when the wind has filled its sails, and it is making joyful progress to the haven whither it is bound! The breath of God, that is the wind which must fill the sails of our souls. We must pray in the Spirit, in the Holy Ghost, if we would pray at all. Lay this, I beseech you, to heart. Do not address yourselves to prayer as to a work to be accomplished in your own natural strength. It is a work of God, of God the Holy Ghost, a work of His in you and by you, and in which you must be fellow-workers with Him—but His work notwithstanding.[1]

[1] R. C. Trench, *Sermons Preached in Westminster Abbey*, 229.

XIX.

The Fit Times for Prayer.

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The Fit Times for Prayer.

1. Should we have special times and places for prayer?

That is a fair question, and one which it is desirable to ask. Undoubtedly the use of this machinery of prayer is attended by a constant danger—a danger which, if it is forgotten, becomes the more threatening. It may betray us into formalism, into the assumption, if not the deliberate conviction, that He who seeks the worship of such as will worship Him in spirit and in truth, is to be propitiated by outward shows. God is not, He cannot be, thus propitiated. Mere hollow forms of prayer may become an abomination to Him. But regular times and words of prayer have always commended themselves to men as being necessary helps to the spirit of devotion. They are witnesses and mementoes of the duty of praying; they lead and encourage and train men to inward prayer. And public or common prayer has, in addition, the virtue of awaking the common consciousness of Christians. We cannot pray together without the use of common forms; and our Lord has attached a special blessing to the joint praying of two or three who are gathered together in His name. We know something of the communion of the saints, of the fellowship in which Christians are spiritually bound to one another; but if we believed in it and realized it more heartily, we should learn the strength in the Divine Kingdom of the union of those whom God has called to be members of one body, and the efficacy of the prayers which they offer through their Head in the one Spirit. Before resolving to absent himself from social worship or to break any other rule intended for the common edification, a Christian ought to satisfy himself not only that the ordinance is not good for his own soul, but also that it is one of which he may beneficially promote the general disuse. He should ask not only, Can I stay away from Church without loss?

but, Is it desirable that other people also should not come to Church?—not only, Is it profitable for myself that I should spend Sunday in such a way? but, Would it be better for the community in general to spend it in a similar way? In Christ, no man lives to himself; and rules which it is good for the whole body that the members should observe become thereby binding on the individual members.

¶ If thou love thine health, if thou desire to be sure from the grennes of the devil, from the storms of this world, from the await of thine enemies, if thou long to be acceptable to God, if thou covet to be happy at the last; let no day pass thee but thou once at the leastwise present thyself to God by prayer, and falling down before Him flat to the ground with an humble affect of devout mind, not from the extremity of thy lips, but out of the inwardness of thine heart, cry these words of the prophet, "Delicta juventutis meae et ignorantias meas ne memineris. Sed secundum misericordiam tuam memento mei propter bonitatem tuam Domine". "The offences of my youth and mine ignorances remember not, good Lord, but after Thy mercy, Lord, of Thy goodness, remember me."[1]

2. But it is in private life and in relation to private prayer that the question of time is most acute. And here it goes without saying that it is impossible to lay down rules, where none have been laid down by God. And indeed it is not difficult to see why none have been thus laid down. In all such matters we have to take into account the varieties of human temperament, and recognize frankly that what might be a profitable rule for one might prove a yoke of bondage to another, and do harm instead of good. Any kind of concentration of mind is much more difficult to some persons than it is to others, and these peculiarities will, of course, follow us into our religious life, rendering it much more difficult for one person to derive benefit from prolonged devotional exercises than it is for another. Then, again, we all know that the minds of some people act much more quickly than do the minds of others, and hence they may get more real help out of a few moments of prayer than others could out of a comparatively lengthened period thus employed. All this and a great deal more needs to be taken into consideration, and must make us careful

[1] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

lest we unduly burden a brother's conscience with rules which, at best, must needs be of a more or less arbitrary character.

Nor is this all. We must believe that God takes our circumstances as well as our temperament into account, and remembers how hard it is for not a few, in these days of pressure and strain, to allot to prayer the time that they would themselves desire. It may be observed, however, in passing, that probably, unless our night's rest is already much shorter than it ought to be, the body would not suffer by the loss of ten minutes or so of its natural repose, while the soul might be an immense gainer by the addition of those minutes to its otherwise hurried devotional exercises. For the really important thing is that we should not be hurried; that there should be nothing hasty or perfunctory in our prayers, but rather spontaneous and delighted intercourse of heart with heart. He who prays because conscience demands that he shall discharge a duty will find his very prayer contribute to loveless unreality. He who prays, on the other hand, because he wants to pray will not be satisfied with anything short of real spiritual communion, and his prayer will bring him into holy and helpful intercourse with his God.

¶ I remember hearing a helpful story of one of England's greatest statesmen, who was as sincere a Christian as he was an ardent patriot. It was at a time when we seemed to be within measurable distance of war with a great European power; and men were almost holding their breath, as they opened their morning newspaper, doubtful of what a day might have brought forth. The strain on the nerves and judgment of those in authority was something terrible, and the post of a Cabinet Minister was anything but an enviable one. A Cabinet meeting was being held, and already there was some irregular conversation passing from one to another about the crisis, every one betraying more or less of agitation and misgiving. Suddenly the door opened, and, a few moments late, the statesman to whom I refer entered, carrying on his face that placid look of settled peace which never seemed to desert him, whatever might be happening around. "Ah!" said the Premier of the time, as he reached out his hand to greet him, "Here comes the 'Central Calm'; now we shall get something done". And I believe that this honourable sobriquet clung to him for many a day. "I could have told them," said his wife to me, "where he gets his calm from. Every day of his life, however late he may have been kept up by his

Parliamentary duties the previous night, he always contrives to have a quiet hour alone with God and his Bible, and so he is ready for whatever may come."[1]

I.

Fixed Times.

The cultivation of the gift of prayer dare not, any more than the gift of meditative contemplation, be left to accident, to become a mere affair of moods (of inclination or disinclination); for in that case prayer would far too often be omitted. It must become a problem to every Christian to educate himself for prayer, by subjecting prayer to a rule, a discipline. In the life of a Christian there must be an order of prayer, appointed times of prayer; and it is a natural requirement that no day pass over without morning and evening sacrifice.

1. What is your time each day for prayer? When do you begin and how long do you continue? The answer in the majority of cases is that there is no fixed time. You have a fixed time for your meals, a fixed time for your business, a fixed time for your games, but for prayer you have no fixed time. You regard prayer as a thing of mood and to be practised only when you feel in the mood for it. So be it. Then the question is, how often does "the mood" incline you to pray? How often has "the mood" impelled you to spend a whole night in prayer? How often has it impelled you to spend even ten minutes in prayer? Can you mention five occasions during the year? Can you mention even one? It must be seen that the "mood" theory of prayer removes prayer clean out of the category of the serious business of life. We should never tolerate in ourselves or in others the transaction of business by mood. But prayer, the greatest business of life, we make contingent on a mood which, in turn, may be contingent upon wounded pride or corroding jealousy or over-indulgence at the table! Furthermore, it must be clear that such a view removes prayer clean outside the most definite teaching of Christ on the subject. The teaching that "men ought always to pray and not to lose heart" is a teaching which directly contradicts the "mood"-view of prayer.

[1] W. H. M. H. Aitken, *The Divine Ordinance of Prayer*, 295.

Violentiam fac tibi ipsi. In this matter the words of Thomas à Kempis have the ring of the Master. He would have us do violence to ourselves and declare war upon all our prayerless moods.

¶ Remember that in the Levitical Law there is a frequent commemoration and charge given of the two daily sacrifices, the one to be offered up in the morning and the other in the evening. These offerings by incense our holy, harmless, and undefiled High Priest hath taken away, and instead of them every devout Christian is at the appointed times to offer up a spiritual sacrifice, namely, that of prayer: for "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth". At these prescribed times, if thou wilt have thy prayers to ascend up before God, thou must withdraw from all outward occupations, to prepare for the inward and Divine.[1]

2. The saints of old observed regular times for prayer. One Psalmist mentions "seven times a day" (Ps. cxix. 164), and on this the Mediæval Church based the seven canonical hours of prayer. The word "seven" here, as in many other places, is probably a round number, not to be taken with literal exactness and simply meaning "several". More precise, probably, is the utterance of another psalm (Ps. lv. 18): "At morning, and evening, and at noontide," which reminds us of Daniel's custom of praying "three times a day" (Dan. iv. 10). Whatever the number may be, the point to be insisted on is that every one should have his definite and regular times for prayer, and, if possible, let nothing trespass upon them.

¶ According to the tradition of Islam, the institution of prayer five times a day was introduced by the great prophets, and these devotional periods are therefore dedicated to them. The Christian may perhaps be led to ask whether such frequent occasions for daily worship may not lead at last to pure formality, and a fettering rather than a freeing of the spirit; but there can be no question either as to the reverence of the worshipper or the intense earnestness of the Mu'azzin's cry: "Come, come! for prayer is better than sleep!" Five times comes the call, which no follower of Muhammad can ever resist. They are as follows: (*a*) At *daybreak*, when, being cast out of Paradise and falling to

[1] Henry Vaughan.

the earth, Adam prayed. Finding himself enveloped in darkness, he could not but thank God for the first grey streaks of dawn when they appeared upon the horizon. (*b*) At *midday*, when Noah prayed, having got safely with his family into the ark. At *midday* also Abraham was thrown by Nimrod into the fiery oven, when by prayer the furnace was changed into a garden of roses. (*c*) In the *afternoon* Moses gave thanks to God when he had safely crossed the Red Sea with the Israelites. (*d*) In the *evening* the Lord Jesus prayed upon the cross and committed His Spirit to God. (*e*) At *night* all the other prophets prayed—Joseph in the pit; Jonah in the whale; Sachariah as he was being torn to pieces; Shoeb, Moses' father-in-law; Hud the wind-maker; the Seven Sleepers, etc.; last of all Muhammad, when in a vision he saw his people in hell, and made intercession for them.[1]

¶ This call to prayer, sung in a sort of florid chant, rings out above every mosque in Islam. In Turkey the flag often floats over the minaret during the function. The crier, or Mu'azzin, is often chosen for the strength and sweetness of his voice. In a closely built city like Sidon it is inspiring to listen from the house top to this human carillon, borne through the sunset glow from minaret to minaret, with many a variety of key and cadence. The singer first faces the south, turning to the other points of the compass as the chant proceeds. In the minarets of the large mosques the singers may be two or more, chanting now alternately, now in unison. "God is great!" they call four times, and then repeat the phrases: "I testify that there is no God but God! I testify that Muhammad is the prophet of God! Come to prayer! Come to salvation! God is great. . . . Mercy and peace be unto thee, O prophet of God!" In some lands after the first or morning call the words are added: "Prayer is better than sleep!"[2]

3. To hurry over this duty would be to rob ourselves of the benefits which proceed from it. We know, of course, that prayer cannot be measured by divisions of time. But the advantages to be derived from secret prayer are not to be obtained unless we enter on it with deliberation. We must "shut the door," enclosing and securing a sufficient portion of time for the fitting discharge of the engagement before us. Prayer has the power of sanctifying life because it brings God into life. Twice in the day it has been

[1] H. Baynes, in *The Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1904, p. 109.
[2] F. J. Bliss, *The Religions of Modern Syria and Palestine*, 200.

for ages the habit of the race to use this talisman, once for the sanctification of the day, once for the sanctification of the night. The morning prayer chimes in with the joy of the creation, with the quick world as it awakes and sings.

¶ Dr. Maclaren, that prince of expositors, realized the necessity of the shut door. Every morning from nine till ten he had a quiet hour with God. In the solitude of silence, his Bible on his knees, he claimed the Divine gift of power. Dr. Alexander Whyte has also emphasized this great truth; he, on the other hand, finds the last hours of night most blessed to his soul. He says, "For myself, I always feel that Divine things thrive best with me, aye, and all things else, when I let nothing invade me and my Bible between ten and eleven at night. And you also are, as a rule, free from all your day's work, and from all your entertainments, and from all your visitors by that hour. And it is about that hour that your Bible always says to you—unless you have completely silenced its voice by your long neglect of it—'What!' it says to you, 'can you not watch with me one hour?' For it knows, and He who puts it into your hand knows, that that hour, so spent, would be the best hour for you of all your twenty-four." [1]

(1) *In the morning.*—In the morning we should look forward to the duties of the day, anticipating those situations in which temptation may lurk, and preparing ourselves to embrace such opportunities of usefulness as may be presented to us. The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the remainder of the day.

But it is sad to think how often we make the urgency of business, or our own weariness of body and mind, an excuse for curtailing within the narrowest space, or neglecting altogether, our morning intercourse with God. We can even persuade ourselves that to keep sacred a special time for private devotion savours of formalism, and thus we neglect a plain duty on the plea of avoiding a dangerous Pharisaism: or we tell ourselves that it is better to leave our praying till we have a more pressing

[1] T. W. Riddle, *The Pathway of Victory*, 119.

sense of need. Sometimes we may let an inconvenient situation for prayer, the want of a place secret enough and far enough removed from disturbance, excuse us from it. Sometimes social or family prayer is thought to absolve us from the duty of private prayer. Sometimes it is postponed from the want of what we call a right spiritual tone, discomposure of mind through a world of cares preventing us from getting the stillness of soul required for communion with God. Sometimes, too, we are hindered from it by the sense of recent sin, the guilt of which, lying on our conscience, whispers to us that the prayer of such a heart as ours would be only a mockery of God.

The great obstacle, however, is the tendency to look upon prayer more as a cold duty than as a blessed privilege and joy, a direct and simple-hearted talk with a loving Father in heaven, able to help and waiting to help whenever a cry for help reaches His listening ear. If we only realized more fully the heart of our Father, to unburden our own heart to Him would be our greatest joy. As our love to Him grows, our love of prayer will grow, in ever-new delightfulness, along with it. As we continue musing the fire will burn, till we would not miss that fellowship for all the world.

¶ If there is any time in the twenty-four hours when men and women should pray, it is before the wheels of the activities of the day have begun to revolve. The King who tells us, "I prevented the dawning of the morning and cried," had realized this. It was with the words of the Hundred and Twenty-seventh Psalm, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," ringing in his ears that Benjamin Franklin, speaking before the Convention assembled to frame a Constitution for the United States of America, pleaded thus for the offering of daily prayers in the House of Representatives:—

"I have lived for eighty-one years, and the longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men. I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall proceed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to business." [1]

[1] E. J. Brailsford, *Thoughts at Sunrise*, 97.

¶ I ought to pray before seeing any one. Often when I sleep long, or meet others early, it is eleven or twelve o'clock before I begin secret prayer. This is a wretched system. It is unscriptural. Christ arose before day and went into a solitary place. David says: "Early will I seek thee"; "Thou shalt early hear my voice". Family prayer loses much of its power and sweetness, and I can do no good to those who come to seek from me. The conscience feels guilty, the soul unfed, the lamp not trimmed. Then when in secret prayer the soul is often out of tune. I feel it is far better to begin with God—to see His face first, to get my soul near Him before it is near another.[1]

¶ For the first sight of Mont Blanc there must always be a notch in the traveller's staff, and the vision must always remain. I reached the Chamounix Valley in the dusk of the evening, when the presence of the surrounding hills could be only felt and not seen. The stars were not shining, and no peaks were visible, and even the lowermost slopes of the monarch of all the mountains were hidden from view. The night wore away. Sleep in such company was almost an impertinence. What else could one do but look out of the window from time to time and watch for the morning? At last, on the snow-covered head of Mont Blanc, which touched the far-away heaven, there rested the rosy glow of the dawn. The impression of that moment can never be effaced. It has often helped a blind and halting faith. How near to us is the sublime presence of God, although we see Him not![2]

¶ Dr. Kidd's grandson, Mr. Henry Oswald, afterwards one of the magistrates of Aberdeen, who, when a boy, was for some time resident in the minister's house, has left amongst his papers a most vivid account of the impression made upon his mind by Dr. Kidd's heroic devotion to duty in the early morn: "In the darkness of a cold winter morning I have once and again heard him rising while the rest of the household was hushed in slumber. I listened while he patiently lit his fire, not with the ready help of lucifer matches, but with flint and steel eliciting a spark (how little we moderns prize our luxuries!); then he began to breathe out his soul in the most earnest tones at the throne of grace; the utterances of his devout heart were not audible to me, who was in an adjoining room, but, youngster as I was, I felt awed as I heard the sound of prayer that often became wrestling, and I knew that the man I revered was doing business with God."[3]

[1] R. M. McCheyne. [2] E. J. Brailsford, *Thoughts at Sunrise*, 13.
[3] J. Stark, *Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen*, 128.

When first thy eyes unveil, give thy soul leave
To do the like; our bodies but forerun
The spirit's duty. True hearts spread and heave
Unto their God, as flow'rs do to the sun;
Give Him thy first thoughts then; so shalt thou keep
Him company all day, and in Him sleep.

Walk with thy fellow-creatures: note the hush
And whispers amongst them. There's not a spring
Or leaf but hath his morning-hymn. Each bush
And oak doth know I AM. Canst thou not sing?
O leave thy cares and follies! go this way;
And thou art sure to prosper all the day.[1]

(2) *In the evening.*—What shall be our attitude when the day is far spent and the time for rest draws near? Shall we allow the gracious Companion who has travelled part of our way with us to leave us? It would be wiser to pray "Abide with us," and to enter the inner chamber of communion with Him before the curtains of night are quite drawn.

¶ The disciples returned at evening and made a report to Christ of their work. Thus I tell Him of my life during the day, my dealings with persons who have come into it, and whatever has been attempted—in short, the whole day's work; its efforts, failures, mistakes, sins, and joy. That is my evening prayer.[2]

¶ Very earnestly would I advise the dedication to Secret Prayer of a strictly regular time; a punctual beginning, and, especially in the morning, a measured and liberal allotment. If I plead less earnestly for a large allowance of time at night, I do it with hesitation and reserve, and only because a conscientious Christian, who is doing the will of God through the day, is likely to be physically tired at night in a way in which he will not be, certainly in his youth, in the morning.[3]

Who goes to bed and doth not pray,
Maketh two nights of every day.[4]

(3) *Midday.*—Then, in the mid-time of the day, if one is able to create amid the whirl of traffic a silent space, how blessedly that leisure may be employed in contemplating the Divine Being

[1] Henry Vaughan.
[2] *Jesus and I are Friends: Life of the Rev. J. R. Miller*, 223.
[3] H. C. G. Moule. [4] George Herbert.

and in pouring out one's heart before Him! The tangled skeins are unravelled then, heat and fret are taken out of the heart, the perplexed path is made plain, burdens and anxieties are rolled on Christ, rough ways become smooth and crooked places are made plain. In the mid-hour of the day God spreads a table before us, in the presence of our enemies.

Daniel could not be content with private devotions in the morning and in the evening. He kneeled in his chamber three times a day, having his windows open toward Jerusalem. This devotion was private. The windows were not open toward Babylon that he might be seen of men to pray, but toward Jerusalem where his God dwelt. Are our windows open sufficiently often if we open them only for a few minutes in the morning and in the evening? From rising till retiring is rather a long spell without an open window. Foul air accumulates, and much fresh breeze from the heights of Zion is excluded, unless there is an opportunity for airing the soul's habitation between these times. If we leave the windows that look toward Jerusalem closed for so many hours, our spirit will become drowsy and even unhealthy. It is good to have a third hour in each day when the door may be closed, and the window may be opened, and the soul may be refreshed by a vision of God.

¶ And here I was counselled to set up one other sail, for before I prayed but twice a day, I here resolved to set some time apart at midday for this effort, and, obeying this, I found the effects to be wonderful.[1]

At noon as he lay in the sultriness under his broad leafy limes,
Far sweeter than murmuring waters came the toll of the Angelus chimes;
Pious and tranquil he rose, and uncovered his reverend head,
And thrice was the Ave Maria and thrice was the Angelus said.
Sweet custom the South still retaineth, to turn for a moment away
From the pleasures and pains of existence, from the trouble and turmoil of day,
From the tumult within and without, to the peace that abideth on high,
When the deep solemn sound from the belfry comes down like a voice from the sky.

[1] *Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser*, 208.

(4) *At night.*—The Psalms contain many references to prayer and meditation during the "night watches". David, like Jacob, realized that God "visited" him "in the night".

¶ Mr. Strachey, writing to Lady Louis, says: "You once expressed a wish to be sure that Maurice had as much personal religion as knowledge of spiritual truth. I think you have since learnt enough to satisfy you on this point; but you will be interested in hearing that Miss B., speaking of him, said, 'He is a man of much prayer'; his sisters told me that when he was with them they frequently found that he had not been in bed all night, having spent the whole night in prayer'."[1]

¶ I am not surprised at David's praying to God in the night watches; in his rising from his bed and ascending to the roof of his house, and when the "mighty heart" of the city "was lying still," and "the mountains which surrounded Jerusalem" were sleeping in the calm brilliancy of an Eastern night, that he should gaze with rapture on the sky, and pour forth such a beautiful psalm of praise as "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers".

The night is more suited to prayer than the day. I never awake in the middle of the night without feeling induced to commune with God. One feels brought more into contact with Him. The whole world around us, we think, is asleep. God the Shepherd of Israel slumbers not, nor sleeps. He is awake, and so are we! We feel, in the solemn and silent night, as if alone with God. And then there is everything in the circumstances around you to lead you to pray. The past is often vividly recalled. The voices of the dead are heard, and their forms crowd around you. No sleep can bind them. The night seems the time in which they should hold spiritual commune with man. The future too throws its dark shadow over you—the night of the grave, the certain death-bed, the night in which no man can work. And then everything makes such an impression on the mind at night, when the brain is nervous and susceptible; the low sough of the wind among the trees, the roaring, or *eerie whish* of some neighbouring stream, the bark or low howl of a dog, the general impressive silence, all tend to sober, to solemnize the mind, and to force it from the world and its vanities, which then seem asleep, to God, who alone can uphold and defend.[2]

[1] *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, i. 205.
[2] *Memoir of Norman Macleod*, i. 151.

II.

Frequent Occasions.

1. The cultivation of the habit of prayer will secure its expression on all suitable occasions.

(1) In times of need, in the first instance; almost every one will pray then. Moses stood on the shores of the Red Sea, surveying the panic into which the children of Israel were cast when they realized that the chariots of Pharaoh were thundering down upon them. "Wherefore criest thou unto me?" said the Lord. Nehemiah stood before King Artaxerxes. The monarch noted his inward grief, and said, "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." That question opened the door to admit the answer to three months' praying; and the hot desire that had risen to God in those slow months gathered itself into one fervent ejaculation, "So I prayed to the God of heaven".

(2) Again, one whose life is spent in fellowship with God will constantly seek and find opportunities for swift and frequently-recurring approaches to the throne of grace. The Apostles bring every duty under the cross; at the name of Jesus their loyal souls soar heavenward in adoration and in praise. The early Christians never met without invoking a benediction; they never parted without prayer. The saints of the Middle Ages allowed each passing incident to summon them to intercession—the shadow on the dial, the church bell, the flight of the swallows, the rising of the sun, the falling of a leaf.

¶ The covenant which Sir Thomas Browne made with himself is well known, but one may venture to refer to it once more: "To pray in all places where quietness inviteth; in any house, highway, or street; and to know no street in this city that may not witness that I have not forgotten God and my Saviour in it; and that no parish or town where I have been may not say the like. To take occasion of praying upon the sight of any church which I see, or pass by, as I ride about. To pray daily, and particularly for my sick patients, and for all sick people under whose care soever. And at the entrance into the house of the sick to say, 'The peace and the mercy of God be upon this house'. After a sermon to make a prayer and desire a blessing, and to pray for the minister."[1]

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 35.

2. There are many, to whom prolonged stated prayers on week days are impracticable, who might, nevertheless, in spite of overcrowded and overstrained lives, win real blessings, not for individuals only, but for the Church and for the world, by faithful and frequent prayer of this kind. Just as there are to the trained ear of a scientific investigator far more sounds in the world than most of us ever hear, so to a Christian trained to hold intercourse with God "the whole air is full of church bells ringing us to prayer".

Stated seasons, stated rules, stated forms of words are as necessary to start us in the art of praying as are similar things in the case of any earthly art or science that we would acquire. For we learn to read from an alphabet, and to write from a copy, to draw from a model, and to play from a scale. Nor can we ever dispense with such forms—speaking of the individual, and not of public worship, where they have another justification—till they have created in us a habit of prayer: while most men who are in carnest will even then consider their continuance advisable, to sustain the habit when already formed, since our power of independent prayer is peculiarly liable to fluctuate with the accidents of our bodily and mental organization. But at the same time, the more real our formal prayer becomes, the less can it remain merely formal. It inevitably develops into ejaculatory prayer: prayer darted upward arrow-like, at no stated time or season, in no stated form of words, but whenever our impulse moves us, or a joy or sorrow strikes us, or a crisis calls to action, or an interval to thought. And as this kind of informal prayer becomes increasingly habitual, the prayerful character is slowly formed, the character of which prayer is the real mainspring, the first necessity, without which it could no longer exist, and whose entire tone and temper is constituted by the fact.

¶ "For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." But neither days, nor hours, nor seasons, did ever come amiss to faithful prayer. Short passes, quick ejections, concise forms and remembrances, holy breathings, prayers like little posies, may be sent forth without number on every occasion, and God will note them in His book. But all that have a care to walk with God fill their vessels more largely as soon as they rise, before they begin the work of the day, and

before they lie down again at night: which is to observe what the Lord appointed in the Levitical ministry, a morning and an evening lamb to be laid upon the altar. So with them that are not stark irreligious, prayer is the key to open the day, and the bolt to shut in the night.[1]

¶ The body may be sound, but the soul can never be sound and healthy that prefers temporal to eternal things. But where the love of eternal things exists, this kind of prayer is not only easy but delightful. We are told that the brethren in Egypt use frequent prayers that are brief and swiftly ejaculated. This they prefer to slower methods, that the vigilant and elevated attention so necessary in prayer may not be dulled or dissipated. In this they show that when attention cannot be sustained it ought not to be deadened, but that when it is sustained it should not be readily interrupted.[2]

3. Our fathers used to speak much of and practise this "ejaculatory" prayer. It would be a great gain to all of us if we could learn again the method and practise it. Notice one or two advantages which will follow from the cultivation of ejaculatory prayer.

(1) By the frequent entertainment of holy thoughts, the heart will *be preserved from many forms of evil*, and, as we say, from a good deal of worse company. There are times when the mind seems ready to give indiscriminate admission to all kinds of idle fancies—impossible things, that never can be, extravagant things, that are never likely to be, sinful things, that it is to be hoped never will be. Now, what a clear gain to character it is, if we can give to this restless activity of the inner man a sanctified direction, if we can manage to fill up the small gaps and crevices of unoccupied life with holy thoughts, redeeming the time which would otherwise be waste, or worse than waste, for God, and the soul, and heaven.

(2) Again, it will be a benefit of this holy habit, that it will *spiritualize the experiences of common life*. It must surely be a recommendation of ejaculatory prayer that it will hinder no business, consume no time, interfere with no prudent and needed preparations for ordinary duty. All it asks is to be allowed to interlace, with the rough, hard, deadening detail of daily engage-

[1] Jeremy Taylor. [2] St. Augustine, *Epist.*, 130 *ad Probam*.

ment, a thread of elevating and purifying thought—to lead us, under the wear and worry of great trifles, always to take the Angel of the Divine presence with us—to make us write, even on the bells of the horses, "Holiness unto the Lord". It is a great fault among us that we keep business and devotion too much apart. The duties belonging to them we seem to think must have separate times and separate places for their performance, —as if an altar could not be set up at the place of the receipt of custom, or as if the incense which ascends from the plough, or from the loom, would be regarded of God as coming from a strange fire. Old George Herbert, speaking of doing everything "for the Lord's sake," says:—

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws
Makes that and th' action fine.

And the great Sir Matthew Hale, recommending short acts of devotion in the midst of business, observes, "This is the great art of Christian chemistry, and by means of it the whole course of this life becomes a service to Almighty God and an uninterrupted state of religion".

(3) And then, lastly, it is an advantage of ejaculatory prayer that it *tends to keep up the life and fervour of our more formal and lengthened exercises.* They are the little showers that swell the grain, the frequent droppings that wear the stone, the oft-paid visits that bind two loving hearts. The believer who loves Christ thinks it too long a time to go from morning to night without a sight of Him, without a word with Him, without a look towards Him. Such long intermissions cause him, when he meets his Lord at night, to meet Him as a stranger. He remembers that plans, schemes, purposes, have been resolved on in the course of the day, and the best Friend has not been consulted. And he is conscious of a coldness. The heart comes dead to its work—cannot discharge itself of the day's anxieties and cares. Now if, from time to time during the day, thoughts of Christ had been allowed to mingle with these anxieties, there would have been, in the evening meeting with Christ, no strangeness, and, on the face of the throne, no cloud. The passing from business to

devotion would then be felt to be but the passing from God in the world to God in the closet. We have changed our place, but not our company. We have only to put fresh fuel on a fire which has never gone out. And thus there would be more freshness and life in our retired devotions, because, in the midst of all the hurry of our active duties, we had kept up that pious habit of Nehemiah—"So I prayed to the God of heaven".

¶ In company, on the street, in the railway train, in the bustle of business, amidst the solemn fervours of his preaching, and in the very torrent of his own quaint, racy, picturesque talk in social life—in short, everywhere and in all things, his faith went up to heaven in quick, pointed, battle-like cries. When others were preaching we have often heard him praying thus, "Help, Lord, help! Give the blessing, and save many!" [1]

¶ It is a great word in the letter to the Hebrews which declares that we "may find grace to help us in time of need". I have always felt that I should like to discover some idiom of my own language which would gather the thought of the Greek phrase, and I am not sure but that it is perfectly done by saying that the message declares we may find grace to help us "in the nick of time". [2]

¶ There is a little story of Samuel Rutherford which has been preserved for us by Robert Wodrow, the untiring chronicler of the sayings and doings of his Covenanting ancestors; and Wodrow got it from James Stirling, minister of the Barony Parish in Glasgow, and himself a contemporary of those valiant men who were out for years in the sleet and hail. Rutherford, Stirling said, had a particular liking for one of his brethren, James Guthrie, the fearless confessor who died a martyr's death at the Mercat Cross of Edinburgh in the June of 1661. Once he was staying for a short time in the manse of his friend; and on a certain morning, the door of his room having been left ajar, the maid-servant saw him walking up and down within its walls, lost in meditation and prayer. She overheard three petitions, which he spoke out audibly and with much earnestness. They came from his lips, she remarked, with an interval between each of them, as though every one were too weighty and too pregnant to be hurried over. This was the first, *Lord, make me believe in Thee!* There was a pause. He sat down, and mused, and rose again;

[1] J. Macpherson, *Duncan Matheson*, 39.
[2] G. Campbell Morgan, *The Practice of Prayer*, 113.

and now his cry was, *Lord, make me love Thee!* Again he waited for a minute or two; and by and by the entreaty came, *Lord, make me keep all Thy commandments!*[1]

III.

Much Time.

1. While many private prayers, in the nature of things, must be short; while public prayers, as a rule, ought to be short and condensed; while there is ample room for and value put on ejaculatory prayer—yet in our private communion with God time is a feature essential to its value. Much time spent with God is the secret of all successful praying. Prayer which is felt as a mighty force is the mediate or immediate product of much time spent with God. Our short prayers owe their point and efficiency to the long ones that have preceded them. The short prevailing prayer cannot be prayed by one who has not prevailed with God in a mightier struggle of long continuance. Jacob's victory of faith could not have been gained without that all-night wrestling. Much with God alone is the secret of knowing Him and of influence with Him. There can be no converse with a holy God, no fellowship between heaven and earth, no power for the salvation of the souls of others, unless much time is set apart for it. Just as it is necessary for a child for long years to eat and learn every day, so the life of grace depends entirely on the time men are willing to give to it day by day.

¶ The men who have most fully illustrated Christ in their character, and have most powerfully affected the world for Him, have been men who spent so much time with God as to make it a notable feature of their lives. Charles Simeon devoted the hours from four till eight in the morning to God. Mr. Wesley spent two hours daily in prayer. He began at four in the morning. Of him, one who knew him well wrote: "He thought prayer to be more his business than anything else, and I have seen him come out of his closet with a serenity of face next to shining". John Fletcher stained the walls of his room by the breath of his prayers. Sometimes he would pray all night; always, frequently, and with great earnestness. His whole life was a life of prayer. "I would not rise from my seat," he said, "without lifting my heart to God." His greeting to a friend

[1] A. Smellie, *The Daily Walk*, 6.

was always, "Do I meet you praying?" Luther said: "If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer." He had a motto: "He that has prayed well has studied well".

John Welch, the holy and wonderful Scotch preacher, thought the day ill spent if he did not spend eight or ten hours in prayer. He kept a plaid that he might wrap himself when he arose to pray at night. His wife would complain when she found him lying on the ground weeping. He would reply: "O woman, I have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them!"[1]

¶ Bishop Andrewes was a busy man, and yet he spent five hours a day in devotion! Bishop Dupanloup, of Orleans, led a very active life, yet he spent four hours a day in devotion! The late Dean of Lincoln (Dr. Butler), was one of the most active and incessant workers of our time, yet he rose every morning, summer and winter, for fifty years at six o'clock, for the purpose of securing time for quiet communion with God. But we may go immeasurably higher for an example. We may look at our Lord's life of unwearied activity, so unwearied that at times He and His Apostles "had no leisure so much as to eat". Well, then, consider such texts as these: "In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed". "He withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed." Or again, "He continued all night in prayer to God" before choosing His Apostles. Or again, after "a successful day," after the feeding of the five thousand, "when He had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone."[2]

2. Spiritual work is taxing work, and men are loath to do it. Praying, true praying, costs an outlay of serious attention and of time which flesh and blood do not relish. Few persons are made of such strong fibre that they will make a costly outlay when surface work will pass as well in the market. We can habituate ourselves to our beggarly praying until it looks well to us; at least it keeps up a decent form and quiets conscience—the deadliest of opiates! We can slight our praying, and not realize the peril till the foundations are gone. Hurried devotions make weak

[1] E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*, 48.

[2] B. W. Randolph, *The Threshold of the Sanctuary*, 90.

faith, feeble convictions, questionable piety. To be little with God is to be little for God. To cut short the praying makes the whole religious character short, scrimp, niggardly, and slovenly.

¶ I suspect I have been allotting habitually too little time to religious exercises as private devotion, religious meditation, Scripture reading, etc. Hence I am lean and cold and hard. God would perhaps prosper me more in spiritual things if I were to be more diligent in using the means of grace. I had better allot more time, say two hours or an hour and a half, to religious exercises daily, and try whether by so doing I cannot preserve a frame of spirit more habitually devotional, a more lively sense of unseen things, a warmer love to God, and a greater degree of hunger and thirst after righteousness, a heart less prone to be soiled with worldly cares, designs, passions, and apprehension, and a real undissembled longing for heaven, its pleasures and its purity.[1]

IV.

Always.

"Men ought *always* to pray, and not to faint." The words are the words of our Lord, who not only sought ever to impress upon His followers the urgency and the importance of prayer, but set them an example which they, alas! have been far too slow to copy. How is it to be done? Not easily and not all at once. There are steps in the process. Says William Law: "The painful sense and feeling of what you are, kindled into a working State of Sensibility by the Light of God within you, is the Fire and Light from whence your Spirit of Prayer proceeds. In its first kindling nothing is found or felt but Pain, Wrath, and Darkness, as is to be seen in the first kindling of every Heat or Fire. And therefore its first prayer is nothing else but a sense of Penitence, Self-condemnation, Confession, and Humility. This Prayer of Humility is met by the Divine Love, the Mercifulness of God embraces it: and then its prayer is changed into Hymns and Songs and Thanksgivings. When this State of Fervour has done its Work, has melted away all earthly Passions and Affections, and left no Inclination in the Soul, but to delight in God alone—then its Prayer changes again. It is now come so near to God, has

[1] William Wilberforce.

found such Union with Him that it does not so much pray as live in God. Its Prayer is not any particular action, is not the Work of any particular faculty, not confined to Times, or Words, or Place, but is the Work of his whole Being, which continually stands in Fulness of Faith, in Purity of Love, in absolute Resignation, to do, and be, what and how his Beloved pleases. This is the last State of the Spirit of Prayer, and its highest Union with God in this Life."

1. The *always* speaks for itself. Prayer is not a meaningless function or duty to be crowded into the busy or the weary ends of the day, and we are not obeying our Lord's command when we content ourselves with a few minutes upon our knees in the morning rush or late at night when the faculties, tired with the tasks of the day, call out for rest. God is always within call, it is true; His ear is ever attentive to the cry of His child, but we can never come to know Him if we use the vehicle of prayer as we use the telephone—for a few words of hurried conversation. Intimacy requires development. We can never know God, as it is our privilege to know Him, by brief and fragmentary and unconsidered repetitions of intercessions that are requests for personal favours and nothing more. That is not the way in which we can come into communication with heaven's King. "The goal of prayer is the ear of God," a goal that can be reached only by patient and continued and continuous waiting upon Him, pouring out our heart to Him and permitting Him to speak to us. Only by so doing can we expect to know Him; and as we come to know Him better we shall spend more time in His presence and find that presence a constant and ever-increasing delight.

¶ I never prayed more earnestly nor probably with such faithful frequency. "Pray without ceasing" has been the sentence repeating itself in the silent thought, and I am sure it must be my practice till the last conscious hour of life. Oh, why not throughout that long, indolent, inanimate half-century past?[1]

¶ It is in this sense that the old epigram is true, *Laborare est orare*. Epigrams are dangerous things if pressed too far, for they generally express only one element of truth. So it is

[1] John Foster.

here. To a certain extent it is true to say that "work is prayer," but no more. All work done for God's glory and man's good is another form of expression of this attitude of mind to God, and in that sense it is *prayer*. The liturgy and the work are the visible outcome of the same state of mind and feeling. Work and prayer have a common factor, but neither can be the substitute for the other.[1]

I am content to live the patient day:
The wind sea-laden loiters to the land
And on the glittering gold of naked sand
The eternity of blue sea pales to spray.
In such a world we have no need to pray:
The holy voices of the sea and air
Are sacramental, like a mighty prayer
In which the earth has dreamed its tears away.
We row across the waters' fluent gold
And age seems blessèd, for the world is old.
Softly we take from Nature's open palm
The dower of the sunset and the sky,
And dream an Eastern dream, starred by the cry
Of sea-birds homing through the mighty calm.[2]

2. Does "pray without ceasing" refer to continual acts of prayer, in which we are to persevere till we obtain, or to the spirit of prayerfulness that should animate us all the day? It includes both. The example of our Lord Jesus shows us this. We have to enter our closet for special seasons of prayer; we are at times to persevere there in importunate prayer. We are also all the day to walk in God's presence, with the whole heart set upon heavenly things. Without set times of prayer the spirit of prayer will be dull and feeble. Without the continual prayerfulness the set times will not avail.

¶ The steady reading of a chapter of the Bible in the morning and evening, and at least the deliberate *utterance* of appointed prayer, with endeavour to fix my thoughts upon it (often successful—and always sincere), gave me a continually increasing knowledge of the meaning both of the Old and New Testaments, and of what prayer meant for Christians of old time: farther than this, all my love of the beauty, or sense of the majesty, of natural things was in direct ratio to conditions of devotional feeling; and

[1] T. W. Drury, *The Prison-Ministry of St. Paul*, 114.
[2] G. Cabot Lodge, *Poems and Dramas*, i. 66.

I never climbed to any mountain, alone, without kneeling down, by instinct, on its summit to pray.[1]

¶ It is given him "always to pray, and not to faint". Not that he is always in the house of prayer, though he neglects no opportunity of being there. Neither is he always on his knees, although he often is, or on his face, before the Lord his God. Nor yet is he always crying aloud to God, or calling upon Him in words: for many times "the Spirit maketh intercession for him with groans that cannot be uttered". But at all times the language of his heart is this: "Thou brightness of the eternal glory, unto Thee is my heart, though without a voice, and my silence speaketh unto Thee". And this is true prayer, and this alone. But his heart is ever lifted up to God, at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, God is in all his thoughts; he walks with God continually, having the loving eye of his mind still fixed upon Him, and everywhere "seeing him that is invisible".[2]

¶ Other actions hinder one another: I cannot walk and sit down; I cannot build and write; I cannot travel and sleep. But prayer, as logicians say of substance, *nihil habet contrarium*, "hath nothing contrary to it," but applies itself to everything. I may walk and pray, I may build and pray, I may write and pray. And St. Jerome will tell us, *Sanctis etiam ipse somnus est oratorio*, "that holy men do pray even when they sleep".[3]

3. What was St. Paul's idea of unceasing prayer? There happens to be a passage in one of his Epistles in which he seems to have hinted at it—in which, while not fully explaining himself, he gives us at least a clue to follow. "Praying always," he writes to the Ephesians, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the *spirit*,"—as though he had written, "Whatever you may be saying or doing, however head, heart, hands may be occupied, be praying always in the spirit of your sayings and doings, in your pervading temper and disposition, in your central animating principle". Asking God and worshipping God were

[1] Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, ii. (Epilogue).
[2] John Wesley, *Works*, viii. 343.
[3] Anthony Farindon, *Sermons*, iv. 218.

regarded by him, then, as the utterance at intervals of a certain spirit, a certain spirit which might be otherwise and variously uttered; and to live in that spirit, to have it constantly pulsing and ruling within us, would be his idea of praying without ceasing.

Now this spirit which constitutes prayerfulness, and which may be, and should be, habitually ours, is a compound of three elements.

(1) First, Aspiration. In all true praying we have the cry of an inward hunger for better being and doing. It means a soul looking onward and upward to an ideal which, seen afar off, is yearned after; it means a soul discontented with itself, with its present attainments and performances, unable to rest in things as they are, and craving more and nobler. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." There is the wistful reaching forth towards something higher and more perfect. Wherever, then, improvement is being desired and sought (not, of course, improvement in our surroundings, but in ourselves; not of course, improvement in what we have, but in what we are and do), there is prayer, even though it may not be breaking out at the time in any cry to God, since there is the very same spirit which breathes in the cry of prayer.

¶ You know the picture which underlies those words of St. Paul—"Not reckoning myself yet to have laid hold, I press toward the mark for the prize of my high calling,"—the picture, namely, of the Greek racer in his agony of effort and hope, as with eye fixed on the distant garland, he throws himself into the struggle to win it, his body leaning forward, his chest heaving, every muscle strained, every vein starting, the sweat-drops beading his brow. That might stand for a pictorial representation of prayer—he is ever praying in the spirit who is ever aspiring. Well, here is a man, an artisan in his workshop, or an artist in his studio, engrossed through the day, from morn to eve, in striving to realize his idea of what would be fitting and fine; anxious to overtake, if possible, or at least approach nearer than yesterday, his vision of the truest and the best, in surpassing what he has hitherto done—trying to succeed, disappointed, dissatisfied with the result, and trying again, altering, rubbing out, touching, and touching anew, intent upon executing his noblest, until the night falls; and, "behold, he prayeth," and has been praying unpausingly, the livelong day.[1]

[1] S. A. Tipple, *Sunday Mornings at Norwood*, 114.

(2) And again, what is praying but the utterance Godward of a holy and benevolent love—love for Divine things and for men? When the heart withdraws at seasons from the activities and occupations of daily life, from the customary round of work and duty, to commune with the beauty of the Lord, with the infinite perfection of the All-Father, and to make request of Him for light and guidance, for reinforcement and renewed inspiration, what is it but the uprising and forthgoing of the heart's love for the great things of being, for those realities which, while most real and substantial, most precious and enduring, may have but comparatively little charm or attraction for the many? Is it not affection for them, temporarily sighing and suing at the feet of God? When, then, a man is seen devoted, for example, to the pursuit of worthy knowledge, pursuing it simply and sincerely for its own sake, caring more for it than for material comforts, mere worldly success, or fulness of gold, content, and willing to deny himself for it in some respects, and finding delight in the witnessed progress and diffusion of such knowledge; when a man is seen, eager in search and inquiry after truth, ready, if needful, to follow it through storms, to incur trouble, and suffer sacrifice for it; or concerned to keep a good conscience rather than keep or gain, at its expense, a good name; infinitely more solicitous for honour and righteousness than for pleasant place and smooth circumstance, giving the supremacy always to moral considerations, always sympathizing strongly with what is just and pure and true—when a man is seen living thus, is he not exemplifying from morn to eve the very holy love of prayer, that love for the best things of which all real prayer is the expression? There it is possessing him permanently, and in being permanently possessed with it, he prays "without ceasing".

But who really prays for himself alone? Who can begin to call upon the great Father of the world, to enter with his burdens into the presence of the Eternal Goodness, and not begin to throb with desire for others? You hear the prayers, the repeated prayers, of the Church, in its assembly, "for all sorts and conditions of men," for the sick in their chambers and the workers at their toil, for them that struggle and them that weep, for the heavy laden and the weary; and in so far as these are genuine prayers, what are they but love crying? Let love, then, be

abiding in us, a spirit prompting to kindly thought and generous action, to unselfish considerateness and timely helpfulness, ready always to offer sympathy and afford what succours it can, to feel with those around it in their joys and griefs, to study their interests and charge itself with their needs; a spirit of willingness to serve, and that seeks and seizes opportunities of serving; let such love be abiding in us, constraining us to be ever recognizing duly, and answering graciously, the appeals to us, that may lie in the state and condition of others; and are we not in spirit and deed praying unceasingly, in spirit and deed, still praying, when we have risen from our knees, and though we should never kneel again?

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and lily-like in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold;—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?"—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answer'd, "The names of those who love the Lord".
"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still; and said, "I pray thee then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men".

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.[1]

(3) Then, last of all, all true praying has its root, has it not, in trust, and means trust. If it be anything, it is the casting of the soul on God as its all—as its refuge and support—and is the outflow of the soul's confidence that He is mindful of us and cares for us; that the world is under His government, and that we are His children. In praying, we commit ourselves to Him, with the faith that His is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory; that His wisdom and goodness are ours, in exercise for us. This

[1] Leigh Hunt, *Abou Ben Adhem*.

is the prayerfulness in spirit; for prayer is *trust*, trust in a reigning rectitude and benevolence, and in its invisible things; trust in conscience, and in moral principle, and in the Kingdom of God; and he who is thus habitually trustful,—able with tranquil courage to resign himself to duty, and fearful of nothing but unfaithfulness thereto—he, prays "without ceasing".

If we with earnest effort could succeed
To make our life one long connected prayer,
As lives of some perhaps have been and are,
If never leaving Thee, we had no need
Our wandering spirits back again to lead
Into Thy presence, but continued there,
Like angels standing on the highest stair
Of the sapphire throne, this were to pray indeed.
But if distractions manifold prevail,
And if in this we must confess we fail,
Grant us to keep at least a prompt desire,
Continual readiness for prayer and praise,
An altar heaped and waiting to take fire
With the least spark, and leap into a blaze.[1]

[1] R. C. Trench, *Poems*, 141.

XX.

The Manner of Prayer.

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The Manner of Prayer.

He understands little of the psychology of the Christian life who does not know that attitude and language may greatly help him who would really pray. Certain physical habitudes have been associated with our holiest aspirations and expectations; certain words, whether of Holy Writ, of ancient liturgy, or of individual choice often repeated, have voiced the soul's desire and uttered its praise. It is easier to pray kneeling in the familiar places and often in the very words made precious by frequent use; that is, if the real spirit of prayer is present. The danger is that these purely external conditions shall be given too large a place. They are not prayer at all. They are no necessary part of prayer. If they tend to formality or indifference, they hinder prayer. Prayer is at heart something spiritual. It is the longing contact of the spirit of man with the Spirit of his Maker.

Four of these "purely external" conditions remain for brief treatment. They are:—

I. The Posture in Prayer.
II. Form or Freedom in Prayer.
III. The Length of Prayer.
IV. The Voice in Prayer.

I.

The Posture.

1. The familiar postures and positions of prayer are valuable not so much for their importance to God as for the aids which they give to us, or for the testimony which they bear to others; and they are to be insisted on only so far as they maintain and quicken the devotion in ourselves, or are necessary to make the requisite confession to the world.

¶ In Essex, in the year 1550, a number of religious persons who had received the Word of God as their only rule of faith and conduct, and who therefore differed in certain particulars from the dominant party in the Church, met to confer on the ordering of worship. The chief point in debate related to the attitude which one ought to observe in prayer—whether it were better to stand or kneel, to have the head covered or uncovered. The decision arrived at was that the material question had reference not to the bodily posture, but to the direction of the mind. It was agreed that that attitude is most seemly which most fitly expresses the desires and emotions of the soul.[1]

2. Scripture is exceedingly abstinent in legislation about the external circumstances of God's worship. Often as the subject of prayer comes up, and copious as the sacred writers are regarding the duty and privilege and due manner of prayer, there is an almost entire absence of authoritative directions regarding its external accompaniments. Accordingly, you will find no absolute rule laid down anywhere in Scripture regarding the right posture in prayer. The point is not utterly trivial; prayer is such a vital element in the Divine life that nothing relating to it can be absolutely without importance. Doubtless one posture is more favourable to a right frame of mind in prayer than another. Yet not one word is said on the subject in Scripture in the way of authoritative prescription. God has laid down no inflexible rule; no doubt for this very good reason, that the posture should vary according to varying circumstances. There is a time to pray standing; there is a time to pray sitting; there is a time to pray kneeling; there is even a time to pray reclining, for we know that many an acceptable prayer has gone up to heaven from the invalid's couch.

The posture most frequently mentioned in Scripture in connexion with prayer is prostration. The worshipper approached God with the same deference as he showed when presenting a petition to an earthly superior. Unfortunately the Hebrew equivalent for "he prostrated himself" is usually rendered in the English Bible by "he worshipped". The prostration, with the face to the ground, was commonly preceded by the bowing of the head, and it is sometimes described as a falling to the earth upon

[1] D. M. McIntyre, *The Hidden Life of Prayer*, 61.

the face. Thus Ezekiel fell on his face when he saw the glory of Jehovah in the plain, and in this attitude he offered his brief intercessory prayers. Jesus, too, falls on His face in Gethsemane, and it is thus that the angels in the Apocalypse (Rev. vii. 2) offer their praise to God. It is adopted in prayers of gratitude as well as of supplication. A very peculiar posture is that of Elijah, who, on Mount Carmel, put his head between his knees. The context suggests that this may have been the attitude of one who prayed for rain.

Prayer could also be offered kneeling. In point of fact most references to kneeling appear to belong to the later books. Daniel, Stephen, Peter, Paul knelt: these prayers are all petitions or intercessions.

Sometimes, however, the worshipper stood. It was standing that Hannah prayed for a son, that Solomon blessed the people, and that Jeremiah interceded for them. The "hypocrites" in Jesus' time stood at prayer, but He presupposes the same attitude for His own disciples. The Pharisee offered his prayer of gratitude standing; so also did the publican his for mercy; and in Revelation vii. 10, a great multitude in heaven stands to praise God. Thus this attitude could be adopted alike in prayers of petition, of intercession, and of thanksgiving. It has been suggested, with some probability, that ordinarily prayer was offered kneeling or standing, with prostration at the beginning and the end.

Sitting does not seem to be a particularly natural attitude in prayer: but it occurs at least once, in David's prayer of gratitude, and possibly another time, in a context of sorrow.

¶ Kneeling is the attitude of humility, of confession, of entreaty, of worship. Some have gone further, and thought that kneeling in prayer is a symbol of man's fallen state, that he can no longer stand erect before God, but is broken and crushed in the presence of Jehovah. Certainly kneeling is the natural position of man before the Almighty and All-Holy Creator. So the holiest and highest of men have approached God. Solomon, the greatest, except David, of all Jewish kings, upon the day of the dedication of the Temple, knelt down before all his people and presented his prayer to God. Ezra, the priest, on receiving news of the people's sin, tells us: "I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God". Daniel, the prophet, when, in the city of idolatry, he heard of the decree for-

bidding prayer, except to the king, for thirty days, went into his house and "kneeled upon his knees" as before.[1]

3. In the early Church to pray kneeling was associated with humiliation, penance, and fasting; and so we find that, during the joyous season between Easter and Whitsuntide, not only were the regular fasts—on Wednesdays and Fridays—not observed, but also prayers were said standing. The same difference in the attitude of those praying was also made on Sundays, and Tertullian speaks of "some few" who abstained from kneeling on Saturdays also, the Jewish Sabbath. "As to kneeling in prayer different customs are permissible. There are some few who do not kneel on the Sabbath (Saturday). . . . We, however, as we have been taught, on the day of the Lord's Resurrection only, ought to be free not merely from the humiliation of kneeling, but also from all that entails anxiety and all serious duties, putting off even our business for fear we should give place to the devil. The same also applies to the interval between Easter and Whitsuntide, which we mark with the like solemn exultation." So, "on the Lord's Day we consider it wrong to fast, or to pray on our knees. We enjoy this same liberty from the day of the Passover right on to Pentecost." On the other hand, kneeling is customary at other times, at early morning prayers, on fast days and "station days".

¶ No matter when or where it is uttered, the Moslem formula of prayer is unvarying. The prescribed series of positions—standing, bowing, kneeling, with the head at times bent to the earth and the hands in various positions: hanging at the side, folded on the stomach, stretched out from the lobes of the ears, touching the knees, or spread on the earth—these positions, with the accompanying ejaculations and quotations from the Koran constitute a *rak'ah*, or prostration.[2]

¶ Bishop Latimer, the martyr, towards the end of his life used to spend so much time kneeling in prayer that he had to be assisted to rise. He forgot his troubles when pouring out his soul before God.[3]

[1] J. W. Ewing, *The Undying Christ*, 70.
[2] F. J. Bliss, *The Religions of Modern Syria*, 201.
[3] J. W. Ewing, *The Undying Christ*, 71.

4. Yet the idea that we can pray only when kneeling is one of the things that hinder us in prayer. Many would probably spend a much longer time in communion with our Lord than they do if they could bring themselves to believe that standing, walking, sitting, and even lying down may be attitudes of prayer. All are brought under the Apostle's injunction that we should "pray without ceasing". It is much to be wished that the same variety of posture should be employed in private as in public, that so we might learn not only to make the half-hour or hour spent with Him as restful as possible, but to associate with Him every attitude that we adopt.

¶ In prayer to God, men do with the members of their bodies that which becometh suppliants, when they bend their knees, when they stretch forth their hands, or even prostrate themselves on the ground, and whatever else they visibly do, albeit their invisible will and hearts' intention be known unto God, and He needs not these tokens that any man's mind should be opened unto Him: only hereby one more excites himself to pray and groan more humbly and more fervently. And I know not how it is, while these motions of the body cannot be made but by a motion of the mind preceding, yet by the same being outwardly in visible sort made, that inward invisible one which made them is increased: and thereby the heart's affection which preceded that they might be made, groweth because they are made. But still if any be in that way held, or even bound, that he is not able to do these things with his limbs, it does not follow that the inner man does not pray, and before the eyes of God in its most secret chamber, where it hath compunction, cast itself on the ground.[1]

¶ I very seldom venture to kneel at prayer in secret. At night it leads almost invariably, and very speedily, to sleeping on my knees, and even in the morning hour, I know not how, recollectedness and concentration of heart and mind are usually quickened in my case by a reverent standing attitude as before the visible Master and Lord, or by walking up and down, either in-doors or, as I love to do when possible, in the open air. A garden may prove a very truly hallowed oratory.[2]

¶ In answer to questions sent to many persons requesting to know their habits in prayer, one answers: "In my secret prayer I always sit (I am unable to kneel), but I sit with my face turned

[1] St. Augustine. [2] Bishop Moule, *All in Christ*, 82.

heavenward and often hold my hands above my head". Another answers: "Frequently walking is most effective. Kneeling is probably more habitual in times of relaxing; walking, when any intense personal problems are to be worked out. In morning, sitting or walking is perhaps more indulged in; at evening, kneeling." [1]

II.

Form or Freedom.

Should prayer be liturgical or extempore? In public prayer the argument is strongest for liturgical, in private prayer for extempore. But it is a striking and encouraging fact that those who use the one form or the other are invariably (in the books we have read) advocates for that particular form.

"There are times," says Dean Church, "when it is the natural thing to pour out our desires and feelings in prayer that rises fresh to our lips for the moment—in extempore, unprepared prayer. But these are not the times of regular, stated, public worship as they come Sunday after Sunday in God's house. Extempore prayer is for extraordinary occasions, and these Sunday services are ordinary ones—one much like another—with nothing special to call for it. For such common prayer it is far better that people should know the words of their prayers and be familiar with them; that they should not be distracting their attention by asking themselves what sort of things the minister will pray for, and how he will frame his words; but that—knowing the words—their thoughts should be fixed on the things to be prayed for. That is the reason why we think it so much wiser and better and more sober, and not only this, but really more spiritual, to pray out of a book, because then we may be sure of having the most beautiful and most spiritual words to pray in—words in which the faith, and hope, and petitions of generations of holy souls before us have gone up to God—prayers fittingly chosen for us by men who were themselves deeply filled with the Spirit of God." [2]

How delicately reserved and how comprehensive and sugges-

[1] F. O. Beck, in *American Journal of Psychology*, ii. 117.
[2] Dean Church, *Village Sermons*, ii. 280.

tive such a mode of social prayer may be, we see in the place which the Anglican liturgy holds in the affections of a large proportion of English Christians. How these words of common prayer become saturated with associations and meaning as years go by! But to limit united prayer to such set forms has its peril of formality and deadness. Life is so various, so changeful, that no form of words can adequately cover its needs. Its perfection leads to the imperfection of indefiniteness, unless supplemented by the spontaneous expression of immediate necessity. There is no higher cultivation of heart and mind than such unaffected and spontaneous communion. Is there any attitude more difficult to maintain, or more fraught with benefit to our character, than fellowship in prayer? New thoughts arise, forgotten truths shine with unusual beauty. Overlooked deficiencies in ourselves are revealed by the unconscious revelation of grace in another, our emotions are deepened and strengthened. At a word the flood-gates of pent-up feeling are opened in loftiest aspirations. Seeds from another garden of the soul find place in our own. Sparks may kindle our enthusiasm from the fire of another's zeal. Even the difficulties of such fellowship increase our power of self-suppression, the delicacy of our sympathy, and the patience of affection. We lose our narrow self-consciousness in proportion to the simplicity and reality of such an exercise.

Whether the prayer of public worship takes the form prescribed by some ritual, or is extempore, will depend upon the preference of individual minds. The liturgical prayer is more universal, the extempore prayer more particular; liturgical forms tend to develop a general religious sense, the extempore prayer tends rather to call forth intensity of feeling in a few.

¶ Forms of prayer can help us to think towards God. If they send our mind to sleep—and they sometimes do that—we had better put them on one side. But if you persist in *thinking out* the grand petitions found in many prayer-books, you will find that they stimulate heavenly thoughts. Dr. Jowett tells us with great beauty that printed and written and repeated prayers are useful to the mind when it is barren, but "when the form has done its work, drop it. A form is a tug-boat to get out to the deep; when you are there, *fish for yourselves*." [1]

[1] J. A. Clapperton, *Culture of the Christian Heart*, 14.

i. Extempore Prayer.

1. There can be no doubt that free prayer is, on the whole, more consonant with the idea of prayer than fixed. If prayer be a real intercourse of the human heart with God, prescribed or studied words would seem to be no more natural than in intercourse with men; and, as Dr. Rainsford has said, "If all men prayed always as some men pray sometimes, there would be no need of a liturgy". In particular, it might be argued that the true Protestant not only feels the impulse, but is under the obligation, to pray in his own words. Just as he claims the right and the duty to think for himself, so it might be said that he has a similar right and duty to express his thoughts, to God no less than to man, in his own way. But the retort would be easy. The Protestant, if he be an educated man, does not, in his thinking, ignore the thoughts of other men. He is not, and could not be if he would, an absolutely independent worker. He builds upon the labours of others, welcomes the help of all who have done or are doing work similar to his own. His independence is not absolute, but relative; it is the independence of a man who stands in human society, a debtor to the present, and a very heavy debtor to the past. Even his independence, though in a sense his birthright, was historically won for him. He can never rid himself of the obligation to learn from others, and his life would be infinitely the poorer if he could. This indeed would not be an argument for the use of fixed forms, but it would be an argument for the study of the best devotional literature that the world has produced; and even those who insist most vehemently on the duty of free prayer confess, by their frequent use of the Lord's Prayer, sometimes also by the abundance of Scripture quotations with which they embellish their own prayers, their enormous debt to the Bible.

2. The prayer which we call extempore is seldom really extempore. It is like many a so-called extempore speech, carefully prepared beforehand, and probably in the case of most conscientious ministers the thought to be expressed has at least been considered. In this respect the man who prays is like the true orator who, in the words of a French writer, "knows what he will say, but does not know how he will say it"; and this

is perhaps the ideal of free prayer. So the contrast between what is commonly called free and liturgical prayer is nothing like so absolute as is usually supposed. There would be a real contrast between liturgical prayer and a prayer which the speaker, without the least premeditation, uttered in immediate dependence upon the inspiration of the Spirit.

3. If extempore prayer has its difficulties and dangers, no less has liturgical prayer. It was instituted partly in the interests of form; and form very easily becomes formality. Where there is little variety in the service, and the same words are repeated week after week, the spirit may easily grow insensible to their meaning. Here, more than anywhere else, the letter can kill. Custom can make fools of us all. The noble prayers may be babbled instead of being prayed, and their spiritual effect upon leader and people may be no more than would be secured by a Tibetan praying machine, moved by wind or water. This danger may be partly obviated by variety in the liturgy, and by giving the congregation a greater part in the service; but it comes back to this, that a prayer, whether free or fixed, as it is a deliberate appeal to God, must always be regarded as one of the most solemn and responsible acts of the religious life, and has therefore ever to be entered upon with a sincerity which custom must not be allowed to dull. Probably the spiritual effort necessary to interpret feelingly a familiar liturgical prayer is greater than that needed to offer an extempore prayer.

¶ The use of the Lord's Prayer by no means excludes but rather involves that we also pray with our own words; or that the prayer delivered to us by the Lord or the Church be individualized in us, corresponding to our special states and relations. The more inward prayer becomes, the more it becomes a matter of conscience, the more will individual self-knowledge, the personal consciousness and confession of sin, be manifested in prayer, while we not only in general confess our sinfulness before God's face, but also our own special sin, our special temptations, our special hindrances; while we likewise in prayer desire to learn what the special will of God is with us, as well regarding our inner life as our external life relations, and we for the one as for the other desire His blessing. With an entirely peculiar importance this individualizing prayer comes forth in the turning-

points of life, in the crises of being, at great decisions; and if we would here have great examples, we may mention Luther, in the ardent, decisive struggles of whose life prayer so often poured forth from the inmost of his unique personality, although always on the foundation of the Lord's Prayer and His promises.[1]

¶ He never "read prayers," he prayed. He poured forth the words of the Church service as the expression of his own deepest thoughts and aspirations. He was manifestly conscious the whole time that he was leading the prayers of a congregation, otherwise his whole manner and voice showed that he was completely absorbed in the actual communion of thought with the Unseen.[2]

ii. Liturgical Prayer.

1. The advantages of fixed prayer at public worship are obvious. Greatest of all, perhaps, is the sense which it brings—if the prayers are ancient—of continuity with the past, and with the present Church of Christ throughout the world. We pray to our Father; and the feeling of continuity and solidarity would undoubtedly be strengthened if, at least in certain parts of public worship, the same prayers persisted throughout the ages and across the world. Religion has a past as well as a present, and no reverent man would wish to cut himself off from that. Rather would he wish to do everything that was not inimical to his spiritual welfare, to encourage his sense of fellowship with his ancient and distant brethren in Christ. The Holy Catholic Church would be even more impressive to the imagination, if she raised her prayers and petitions to God not only with united heart but also with united voice. Besides, religion, though it is creative, is also, in the deepest sense, conservative. It has to do with the things that abide, the needs and the hopes of men, which are ever the same; and if a worthy expression has been found for these things—simple, true, and beautiful—why may it, too, not be suffered to abide, especially as it comes to us fragrant with the memory of myriads of faithful souls?

¶ Behind liturgical prayer lies the wisdom, the piety, the dignity of the whole Church: the congregation can depend upon "comeliness and order". This is by no means so certain where prayer is free. In a church in which free prayer holds, the

[1] H. Martensen, *Christian Ethics*, i. 181.

[2] *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, i. 430.

congregation is absolutely at the mercy of the leader. If he be a man of piety and culture, he can speak and pray to the edifying of the church; and in his prayer there may be a warmth of personal feeling and a ring of personal conviction which are apt to be lacking in the more impersonal prayers of a liturgy. But what if he be a man of bad taste, of little culture, a man with no sense of the serious dignity which ought to mark the worship of the Most High God? And not only the speaker's education, but even his temperament and the condition of his health will affect the nature of the prayers he offers. He will not always be able to say the thing he would. He may be dull or depressed, and this mood may be reflected in his prayers; or—especially in his earlier efforts—he may suffer from nervousness or temporary loss of memory, and this may easily disturb the devotional temper of the congregation. Public prayer is attended by all the difficulties that beset public speech generally. Only men of great natural gift, wide reading, and much experience, can address their fellows extempore in language that is really noble and graceful; and though, in the moment of prayer, feeling may be more exalted, and a man may express a better and deeper self than he can in the more critical atmosphere of a public meeting, it does not follow that his exaltation will exempt him from idiosyncrasies and errors due to inexperience, temperament, or the state of his health. A liturgy affords an absolute safeguard in cases of this kind. The speaker may be depressed, but the prayer will not suffer: for it is not so much he that prays as the Church that prays in him, and her noble words may cheer and strengthen not only the congregation but himself. He may be nervous when he faces the people, and his thoughts may swim away from him; but the prayer is not impoverished, for he says the thing that needs to be said. As a protection against the eccentricity, the frailty, and the inexperience of the individual, the service of the liturgy is inestimable.[1]

2. "I suppose no one," says Newman,[2] "is in any difficulty about the use of forms of prayer in public worship; for common sense almost will tell us that, when many are to pray together as one man, if their thoughts are to go together, they must agree beforehand what is to be the subject of their prayers, nay, what the words of their prayers, if there is to be any certainty, composure, ease, and regularity in their united devotions. To

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 226.
[2] *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, i. 259.

be present at extempore prayer is to hear prayers. Nay, it might happen, or rather often would happen, that we did not understand what was said; and then the person praying is scarcely praying 'in a tongue understanded of the people' (as our Article expresses it); he is rather interceding for the people than praying with them and leading their worship." He gives the following reasons:—

(1) Prayers framed at the moment are likely to become irreverent. Let us consider, for a few moments before we pray, into whose presence we are entering—the presence of God. What need we have of humble, sober, and subdued thoughts, as becomes creatures sustained hourly by His bounty; as becomes lost sinners who have no right to speak at all, but must submit in silence to Him who is holy; and still more as grateful servants of Him who bought us from ruin at the price of His own blood; meekly sitting at His feet like Mary to learn and to do His will, and, like the penitent at the great man's feast, quietly adoring Him, and doing Him service without disturbance, washing His feet (as it were) with our tears, and anointing them with precious ointment, as having sinned much and needing a large forgiveness. Therefore, to avoid the irreverence of many or unfit words and rude half-religious thoughts, it is necessary to pray from book or memory, and not at random.

(2) In the next place, forms of prayer are necessary to guard us against the irreverence of wandering thoughts. If we pray without set words (read or remembered), our minds will stray from the subject; other thoughts will cross us, and we shall pursue them; we shall lose sight of the presence of Him whom we are addressing. This wandering of mind is in good measure prevented, under God's blessing, by forms of prayer. Thus a chief use of them is that of fixing the attention.

(3) Next, they are useful in securing us from the irreverence of excited thoughts. And here there is room for saying much; for, it so happens, forms of prayer are censured for the very circumstance about them which is their excellence. They are accused of impeding the current of devotion, when, in fact, that (so called) current is in itself faulty, and ought to be checked. And those persons (as might be expected) are most eager in their opposition to them who require more than others the restraint of

them. This is an especial use of forms of prayer, when we are in earnest, as we ought always to be, viz., to keep us from self-willed earnestness, to still emotion, to calm us, to remind us what and where we are, to lead us to a purer and serener temper, and to that deep unruffled love of God and man which is really the fulfilling of the law, and the perfection of human nature.

¶ My father, in theory, held that a mixture of formal, fixed prayer, in fact, a liturgy, along with extempore prayer, was the right thing. As you observe, many of his passages in prayer, all who were in the habit of hearing him could anticipate, such as "the enlightening, enlivening, sanctifying, and comforting influences of the good Spirit," and many others. One in especial you must remember; it was only used on very solemn occasions, and curiously unfolds his mental peculiarities; it closed his prayer—"And now, unto Thee, O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, the one Jehovah and our God, we would—as is most meet—with the Church on earth and the Church in heaven, ascribe all honour and glory, dominion and majesty, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen". Nothing could be liker him than the interjection, "as is most meet".[1]

¶ A great prayer which has been transmitted to us by our forefathers is vastly more than a chance collection of sounds or symbols; it is the expression of the highest moments of a holy life lived on earth, concentrated into a few lines of printed matter, but the outcome of his best experience in the noblest activity of which a human being is capable, viz. communing with God; and so it is the ultimate translation, intelligible to us, of things which cannot be uttered.[2]

¶ We value, with a gratitude which we cannot measure, all that is best in the older prayers in the Greek and Roman Liturgies and their many children; but we frankly recognize that the universe in which we modern men live is a bigger universe than that of our fathers, bigger in knowledge, feeling, and all that we mean by experience. Our God is a bigger God, and the need of God—a need to be expressed in prayer—under modern conditions is greater than it was in former days. Our conception of God, Creator, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Redeemer, Guide, Sanctifier, Judge, Destiny, is far larger than it possibly could have been to men of previous ages. We need to embody all this in our prayer.[3]

[1] Dr. John Brown, *Horæ Subsecivæ*, ii. 106.

[2] E. Lyttelton, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 234.

[3] T. Wilson, *In His Name*, 4.

III.

The Length.

If Scripture is silent as to our posture in prayer, equally silent is it regarding the length to which our prayers should extend. This certainly is not a trivial point. A man may well suspect that there is something seriously wrong if his business at the throne of grace never requires more than a few brief moments. Yet you will seek through your Bible in vain for any direction as to how long you ought to continue in prayer. The reason is obvious. The length of our devotions—to speak especially of private prayer, for in social prayer other considerations must also be taken into account—ought to vary according to circumstances. In some circumstances an hour may be quite too short; in others five minutes may be quite too long. And accordingly the Scripture does not hamper us with any unbending rule.

1. Biblical prayers are usually short—very much shorter than the average modern prayer. The very earnest prayer of Hezekiah for deliverance from Sennacherib could easily be spoken in less than a minute and a half; and the beautiful thanksgiving of David, in 1 Chron. xxix. 10-19, in between three and four minutes. But most of the prayers are much shorter than this; and the teaching and practice of Jesus go to confirm the impression that the ideal prayer is short.

¶ Many public prayers are undoubtedly much too long. The so-called "long prayer" in Scotland has little Biblical sanction. In essence the long prayer is a heathen prayer: your Father knoweth what things ye have need of.[1]

¶ Long prayers have always been unsuited to my temperament. The longer they are the harder I have always found it to derive anything of value from them. As a boy I was accustomed, and well able, to sleep as peacefully through the various groups of prayers at the services I had to attend, and yet wake exactly as the rest rose from their knees, as I have known some men able to take exactly forty winks after dinner and no more. I shall carry to my grave gratitude to D. L. Moody, who led me to stay and listen to his message by calling on his audience to sing a hymn

[1] J. E. McFadyen, *The Prayers of the Bible*, 208.

while a long-winded brother should finish his prayer, the duration of which was actually at that moment driving me out of the building. In short, it seems to me that the more keenly I want a thing the briefer my form of petition, and the more directly I come to the point.[1]

(1) A short prayer will be more likely than a long one to concentrate itself upon the matter in hand. In the prayer of Hezekiah after a simple ascription of praise to Jehovah as the only God and the Creator, the king at once makes his request: "Hear the words of Sennacherib, wherewith he hath sent him to defy the living God. . . . Now save us, I beseech thee, out of his hand."

(2) Besides securing concentration, brevity has the further advantage of keeping the speaker in mind of the elementary fact, which some speakers appear to forget, that prayer is an address to God. There are some who habitually speak of God in the third person. The motive might conceivably be one of reverence, though this was certainly not how Jesus taught His disciples to pray. In other cases, the habit may be unconsciously produced by the influence of preaching, in which God is spoken of, not to. Prayer addressed to God in the third person is, in reality, devout meditation—an excellent thing in its way, and not far removed from prayer, but not to be confused with it. Occasionally the third person appears in Hebrew prayer, but, except in the Psalms, it is seldom sustained for any length of time; its place is usually at once taken by a second person. Take the prayer of Jacob for example: "If God will be with me, and will keep me . . . of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee". Or of Solomon: "Will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee." Or of Daniel: "Jehovah our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth, and we have not obeyed his voice. And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt." Similarly, a man may refer to himself in the same sentence in the third person and in the first: "Thy servant doth know that I have sinned".

¶ How much prayer will really profit the life must depend on the character, the training, and the circumstances of individuals:

[1] W. T. Grenfell, *Immortality*, 58.

we must not fall into the fallacy of supposing that because a certain amount of food or medicine will produce a certain effect, twice the amount of it will produce twice the effect.[1]

¶ The depressing power of long prayers is vividly shown in the Life of John Hunt, the Fijian missionary. One day when steam was up in the morning in the steam-launch, and all was ready for taking up the anchor, the missionary said, "We must have morning worship before we start". After reading a psalm he called upon a local preacher to lead in prayer, who prayed very earnestly for nearly twenty minutes. When he had risen from his knees the native engineer looked at the steam-gauge and said quietly, "That brother has prayed forty pounds pressure off the boiler. We shall have to make it up again before we start." At the next weekly prayer-meeting all were warned against long prayers, which lowered the pressure of steam or decreased the spiritual power of united supplication.[2]

2. But the prayer may be too short. In the prayer of confession, for example, there must be time for thinking about our past life and our present, for that comparing of ourselves with the Divine ideal of human life which is called self-examination. And after self-examination must come resolution—definite resolution that we will try to avoid the sins of which we have been reminded, to do the things which we believe to be our duty, to cultivate the qualities of character and the habits of life which we know we must want. This also there must be in our prayers if there is to be reality in the petition, "Deliver us from evil". But if our prayers should be longer than they are apt to be, it is not so much that there may be more words, as that there may be more silence, more thought—time enough to realize that we are in the presence of God; time enough to think of our sins, that we may repent of them; of our temptations, that we may fight against them; of our neighbours, that we may serve them; of our duties, that we may do them.

¶ Why is long-continued prayer so necessary? In order that we may warm our cold hearts, and soften our hard hearts. Be sure of this, in spite of all sophistry, that time and labour are needed to soften and warm the heart. The Kingdom of Heaven

[1] Hastings Rashdall, *Christus in Ecclesia*, 162.
[2] J. Nettleton, *John Hunt*, 70.

suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask them. But we do not know: and never will know but by much prayer. This is experience, as all men of prayer will testify.[1]

¶ In his Life of Cromwell, Lord Morley makes the following quotation from the Minutes of the Westminster Assembly of Divines: "After Dr. Twisse had begun with a brief prayer, Mr. Marshall prayed large two hours most divinely. After, Mr. Arrowsmith preached one hour, then a psalm, thereafter Mr. Vines prayed nearly two hours, and Mr. Palmer preached one hour, and Mr. Seaman prayed near two hours, then a psalm. After, Mr. Henderson brought them to a short, sweet conference of the heart confessed in the assembly, and other seen faults to be remedied, and the convenience to preach against all sects, especially baptists and antinomians." These prodigies of physical endurance in spiritual exercises were common in those days. Johnston of Warriston, intending to spend an hour or two in prayer, once carried his devotions from six in the morning until he was amazed by the bells ringing at eight in the evening.[2]

¶ At the time when we resided together in the same house at Perth, Dr. Duncan, one day when conducting family worship, prayed at very great length. Apprehensive that he had encroached on other duties, he thought that some sort of apology was necessary. With a look of a child who has committed a fault, or rather with the same look which I have often seen him exhibit when he had needlessly lingered over some work to the inconvenience of others, after rising from his knees, he said, "I fear I have been very long to-day, but when one thinks he has got in, it is very difficult to get out again". His prayers were frequently lengthy from an opposite cause, because he failed to find access. The great length of his sermons was usually due to both causes combined; the first part being prolonged, to use his own expression, by the difficulty of getting in, and the second by the equal difficulty of getting out.[3]

IV.

The Voice.

"True prayer," says St. Gregory the Great, "is not to be found in the words of the mouth, but in the thoughts of the

[1] *Father John of the Greek Church*, by A. Whyte, 64.
[2] John Morley, *Oliver Cromwell*, 163.
[3] A. Moody Stuart, *Recollections of the Late John Duncan*, 194.

heart. The voices that reach the ears of God are not words but desires."[1]

1. Prayer, then, is not an affair of words, but an action of the internal spirit. Words are but an imperfect instrument for the manifestation of the deeper movements of the soul. There is in the action of true prayer a great deal which words are incapable of expressing. The truest word of prayer is the interior and spiritual word, that word of the spirit which consists in the silent movements of the soul's desires towards God. The posture of the body, again, should be a kind of silent word expressive of the interior posture of the soul. Of the prayer of words without the prayer of the heart the Almighty speaks with indignation. "This people draw nigh unto me, and with their mouth and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men which hath been taught them" (Is. xxix. 13).

Essential prayer is the desire and effort of the soul to relate itself and all its interests to God and His will. It may find expression in petition or in worship or in obedience or in work of various kinds. Now, from the Divine side, this attitude of the soul is the only thing considered. This is the "effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man" which "availeth much". To it verbal petition adds no effectiveness, and the lack of such petition is no loss. In public prayer verbal petition is necessary to guide the thought of the people and to express their desires and sense of dependence. In private prayer it may often be necessary to fix and intensify the desire. But, in both cases, the essential thing is the attitude and desire of the spirit. The real prayer, the effective prayer, lies in the latter solely and alone.

¶ My view of prayer seems to be fundamentally different from that of many others, for I never have considered it actually necessary to find any words at all in which to clothe my petitions. I have lived a life so irregular, so wandering and so physically exacting, that I have been unable in any way to follow the example of most men and lay aside certain fixed times and seasons for prayer at all. A doctor's life involves irregular day and night work, a sailor's life, as master of a ship, does the same,

[1] St. Gregory, *Moral.*, XXII. xvii. 43.

a travelling lecturer's even more so. Thus I have never settled down in a home of my own, and therefore it may be that my attitude to prayer is necessarily unusual and unconventional.[1]

¶ The value of silent prayer, even in the assembly, is coming more and more to be recognized. Somewhat after the style of the "bidding prayer" employed in the universities, the leader asks for prayer on behalf of specific persons or objects, and each in turn is commended to God in silence, or gathered up in the Lord's Prayer simultaneously repeated. This method has been adopted with excellent results at the Free Church Council Conference at Swanwick recently. It has the merit of focussing and riveting the attention of the whole assembly in one intense moment or two upon the one object, and it breaks through the stereotyped methods of the ordinary prayer-meeting. A community in silent prayer experiences a great influence, and we may indulge the hope that the Spirit of God is given thereby an opportunity to work upon the hearts of those so engaged.[2]

¶ Silent prayer is far more sure than vocal prayer. Prayer uttered is only valuable as it is the outcome of prayer unexpressed. What every one hears is sadly apt to be lost to God.[3]

¶ How it profits me to confess unto Thee, I have just said. And I do it, not with audible words but with the words of the soul, and with the cry of my thought, which Thine ear heareth.[4]

¶ He who prays must address God as though he were in His presence; inasmuch as the Lord is everywhere, in every place, in every man, and especially in the soul of the just. Therefore let us not seek God on earth, nor in heaven, nor elsewhere; rather let us seek Him in our own heart, like unto the prophet that sayeth, "I will hearken unto that which the Lord shall say in me". In prayer a man may take heed to his words, and this is a wholly material thing; he may take heed to the sense of his words, and this is rather study than prayer; finally, he may fix his thoughts on God, and this is the only true prayer. We must consider neither the words nor the sentences, but lift our soul above our self, and almost lose self in the thought of God. This state once attained, the believer forgets the world and worldly desires, and has, as it were, a foreshadowing of heavenly bliss. To this height it is as easy for the ignorant as for the learned to rise; indeed, it often comes about that one repeating the Psalms

[1] W. T. Grenfell, *Immortality*, 63.
[2] J. G. James, *The Prayer Life*, 177.
[3] R. W. Barbour, *Thoughts*, 103.
[4] St. Augustine.

without understanding them makes a more acceptable prayer than the wise man who can interpret them. Words, in fact, are not essential to prayer; on the contrary, when man is truly rapt in the spirit of devotion, speech is an impediment, and should be replaced by mental prayer. Thus it is seen how great is the error of those that prescribe a fixed number of orations. The Lord taketh not joy in a multitude of words, but rather in a fervent spirit.[1]

2. But if the Father seeks the true adorers to adore Him in spirit and in truth, why do we use vocal prayer? First, because Christ has taught us to use vocal prayer, and has given us a perfect form of it by way of example. Secondly, because as members of the Church we owe to God and to each other the public communion of prayer, as well as mutual edification. Thirdly, because vocal prayer is designed for the outward expression of internal prayer, the prayer in spirit and truth. Fourthly, because the words and signs of prayer, especially those provided by the Church, awaken the inward mind and heart to apprehend the light and sense of prayer, and move the affections to lift up the soul in prayer. As St. Augustine says: "By words and signs we are more keenly wakened up to holy desires".

The united supplication of heart and voice especially becomes those who pray for the remission of their sins. The prophet Hosea says to sinful Israel: "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips". The calves of the lips is a figurative expression for the sacrificial offerings of the voice. The tongue is a great offender; it should therefore be a great expiator.

"Take with you words," says the Bible (Hosea xiv. 2), when you come to pray. The words of the mouth, as well as the meditation of the heart, are acceptable to God. Our Lord Himself used words, many times "the same words," when He prayed to His Father. He also taught His disciples to pray, and to pray in words, words repeated in a stated form. Repetitions are never vain so long as they are sincere. It is the insincerity of repetitions that makes them vain, and insincerity renders

[1] Savonarola, in *Savonarola*, by P. Villari, 112.

all prayers alike equally vain, whether those prayers be forms of repeated words or not. There are, indeed, occasions when prayer in words is impossible. In the street, in the market-place, on an unexpected emergency, whenever the spirit flies suddenly to God for counsel and support—on all such occasions words are impossible. There is no time, no opportunity, for words. And, therefore, without words, the unsyllabled prayer is darted up to the throne of God. But on all ordinary occasions of public, domestic, and private devotions, words, even though they be but whispered words, are an important element in earnest and effectual prayer. Thinking over our prayers, without actually saying them, is generally nothing better than a kind of spiritual indolence.

¶ I rarely allow myself to pray quite silently in secret. For myself, I find the wanderings of the mind very much limited and controlled by even the faintest audible utterance of thought.[1]

¶ Dr. Worcester tells of a very characteristic instance of the necessity some men feel to clothe their petitions with words. He was far away in the wilds of North Newfoundland, alone with a guide who to him was a stranger. It suddenly occurred to Dr. Worcester that the man was a giant in strength and obviously poor enough in circumstances to make the acquisition of a kit like his own very, very desirable. After lights were out and darkness reigned complete, Dr. Worcester was stunned to hear some one cautiously moving around outside his tent. Crawling to the entrance and raising the flap, he was able to make out the figure of his guide, which, as he watched him, disappeared behind a bush. To his no small alarm he soon heard a conversation being carried on. There could be no one in these woods but some companion of the guide's. There was no time to be lost. Seizing his revolver he crept out to watch what would develop. Almost immediately the figure of the guide loomed into view against the light of the last embers of the camp fire. He was kneeling on the ground, his hands lifted up in petition to God, to whom he was pouring out his soul in prayer, exactly as if carrying on a conversation with a friend alongside him.[2]

3. The prayers of the Bible are nearly all spoken in a loud voice. Nehemiah offers a silent prayer on an occasion when a spoken prayer was impossible, and in Hannah's prayer for a child

[1] Bishop Moule. [2] W. T. Grenfell, *Immortality*, 68.

"only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard". As a rule, however, the worshipper "cries with a loud voice". Often this is explained by the nature of the situation. It is thoroughly in keeping that the Baal priests, who gashed themselves till the blood spurted, should cry aloud. Oaths made or praises offered by a crowd are naturally spoken in a loud voice, and a speaker who is praying before a large assembly also has to exert his voice. But even private prayers seem, as a rule, to have been spoken loudly. This would be no surprise in the case of so rugged a figure as Elijah, or in the first fresh enthusiasm of conscious sonship; but even Ezekiel prays thus, as he lies upon his face, and briefly pleads for "the remnant of Israel". The leper whom Jesus healed glorified God with a loud voice; and with a loud voice Jesus and Stephen uttered their dying prayer.

¶ When deeply in earnest about some part of their own daily employment, it is a sailor's custom to emphasize his diction rather by the loudness of his voice than by the multiplication of words, or special selection of language. This, too, is very noticeable in their prayers. The majority of praying men get louder and louder as they proceed with their prayer, and eventually shout at the very top of their voices, so that one can even tell before entering the meeting where the crew hail from by the intensity of their petitions.[1]

¶ At the close of prayer, end it with silence. "It is in that lingering moment that my Lord comes to me." [2]

[1] W. T. Grenfell, *Immortality*, 67.
[2] J. A. Clapperton, *Culture of the Christian Heart*, 20.

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